Table of Contents

1. Allegiances
2. Prologue
3. Chapter 1
4. Chapter 2
5. Chapter 3
6. Chapter 4
7. Allegiance Update: 1
8. Chapter 5
9. Chapter 6
10. Allegiance Update: 2
11. Chapter 7
12. Chapter 8
13. Chapter 9
14. Allegiance Update: 3
15. Chapter 10
16. Chapter 11
17. Chapter 12
18. Chapter 13
19. Chapter 14
20. Chapter 15
21. Chapter 16
22. Allegiance Update: 4
23. Chapter 17
24. Chapter 18
25. Chapter 19
26. Chapter 20
27. Chapter 21
28. Final Allegiances

Allegiances

ThunderClan

Leader: **Beetlestar** - Brown-and-white tabby tom

Deputy: **Gingerflame** - Dark ginger tom with amber eyes

Medicine cat: **Rainsong** - Gray-and-silver spotted she-cat

Warriors: **Acornfall** - Ginger-and-brown she-cat with a white belly and paws

Tigerfrost - Dark brown tabby tom with white paws and a cream belly

Apprentice, Twigpaw - Pale brown she-cat with green eyes

Cherryleaf - Fluffy ginger-and-white she-cat with green eyes

Apprentice, Smokepaw - Pale gray tom with blue eyes

Thornstrike - Golden-brown tom with black stripes

Lilydream - White she-cat with silver stripes

Apprentice, Goldenpaw - Golden tabby she-cat

Flowershade - Black-and-white speckled she-cat with blue eyes

Queens: **Berrybush** - Brown-and-cream she-cat with green eyes. Mother to Tigerfrost's kits: Maplekit, a pale cream she-kit with brown stripes, and Pinekit, a dark brown tabby tom with a cream belly

ShadowClan

Leader: **Crowstar** - Black tom with a gray belly and paws

Deputy: **Spiderthorn** - Black and reddish-brown tom with amber eyes

Medicine cat: **Silverash** - Silver-and-white she-cat with pale blue eyes

Apprentice, Foxpaw - Ginger-and-white tom with black legs

Warriors: **Hazelberry** - Gray, brown and white she-cat with green eyes

Tinyshadow - Small black tom

Apprentice, Stempaw - Ginger-and-white tabby tom

Mousefang - Gray tom with a black tail and blue eyes

Eaglefall - Ginger-and-brown tom with a white muzzle and belly

Sunnyheart - Tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat

Owlcry - Brown she-cat with green eyes

Apprentice, Ivypaw - White she-cat with brown dapples and blue eyes

Oaktail - Pale brown tom with amber eyes

Antscreech - Black tom with dark ginger dapples

Elders: **Spikehiss** - Dark brown tom with spiky fur, black stripes and a white face

WindClan

Leader**: Rosestar** - Cream she-cat with green eyes

Deputy: **Hawkgrowl** - Brown tom with black stripes, a white

muzzle and a cream belly

Medicine cat: **Wolfstripe** - Dark gray tom with a white muzzle, belly, paws and black stripes

Apprentice, Cloudpaw - Deaf white she-cat with blue eyes

Warriors: **Brownbranch** - Brown tabby tom

Beesun - Yellow-and-white she-cat with black stripes

Badgerleap - Black tom with white stripes on his face

Apprentice, Mushroompaw - Cream tom with brown and black spots and a white belly

Otterbounce - Dark brown tom with green eyes

Apprentice, Vinepaw - Gray tom with cream spots and a white belly

Whitelion - Tall white tom with dark amber eyes

Frostbreeze - Fluffy gray-and-white she-cat with blue eyes

Apprentice, Dovepaw - Gray-and-cream she-cat with green eyes

Sandypelt - Cream tabby tom

Queens: **Skyflower** - Black-and-silver she-cat with blue eyes. Mother to Otterbounce's kit: Cougarkit, a black she-kit with a light brown head, spots and belly, a black ear and a cream ear with green eyes

Nightshine - Black-and-white she-cat with blue eyes. Expecting Whitelion's kits

Cinderstream - Pale gray tabby she-cat with a white belly. Expecting Badgerleap's kits

Elders: **Volehiss** - Brown tom with a cream belly and white stripes

Poppyflight - Brown-and-white she-cat with a ginger face

RiverClan

Leader: **Shimmerstar** - Silver she-cat with white spots and blue eyes

Deputy: **Splashpelt** - Brown tom with gray stripes and a white belly

Medicine cat: **Jaymoon** - Black-and-gray tabby tom

Warriors: **Bearcloud** - Black tom with a stump for a tail, yellow eyes and a white muzzle

Stonefall - Gray tom

Apprentice, Streampaw - White she-cat with silver paws

Eelstrike - Black she-cat with white stripes and amber eyes

Brackenfall - Dark ginger tom with white paws and a black-striped tail

Echolight - Fluffy dark gray she-cat with a white belly and paws

Apprentice, Leopardpaw - Golden tom with black spots and amber eyes

Birchsong - Dark brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

Blackstream - Black tom with gray stripes and blue eyes

Apprentice, Honeypaw - Golden-and-cream tabby she-cat

Queens: **Amberdawn** - Cream-and-white tabby she-cat with amber eyes. Mother to Brackenfall's kits: Flamekit, a ginger tom with blue eyes, Mosskit, a ginger-and-cream she-kit with a white belly and amber eyes, and Duskkit, a brown-and-cream tom

Cats Outside Clans

Rattlesnake - Brown tom with black stripes and a long, white tail

Nectar - Black-and-cream she-cat

Meadow - Tortoiseshell-and-white she-kit with blue eyes

Hiron - Black-and-white tom with amber eyes

Prologue

The sun shone brightly over the quiet forest. The only things that were interrupting the silence were the birds chirping in the trees, the rivers, and the Clan cats, talking, patrolling, or hunting.

The gorge flowed peacefully without being interrupted by anything. Although it was deadly to cats who fell in it, some cats enjoyed just sitting and watching it.

Far away from the Clans, on the other side of the Thunderpath, in front of some bushes, sat a black-and-cream she-cat with a white chest. Her green eyes looked around impatiently. *Where is he?*

As she was looking at her paws, waiting, she heard paw steps. She looked up and twitched her ears, squinting her eyes.

"I'm home!" A brown tom with black stripes emerged from the bushes, flicking his fluffy white tail.

The she-cat got up and nuzzled him, purring. "I almost thought you abandoned me."

The tom purred, amused. "I would never."

"I know, Rattlesnake." She purred, then sniffed the robin the tom was carrying. "Did you catch that?"

"Yes, but it was pretty difficult. This bird tried to trick me and fly over the gorge." Rattlesnake meowed and dropped it. "Here, are you hungry?"

"Very!" The she-cat exclaimed and crouched, eating the robin. "It's delicious!"

Rattlesnake purred. "Since when are you this hungry?"

"Since yesterday." The black-and-cream she-cat meowed, finishing the robin. She got up and licked her muzzle. "Do you want to go for

a walk?"

"Sure." The tom meowed. "The gorge?"

"Yes!" The she-cat purred.

"All right." Rattlesnake nodded and padded to the Thunderpath, his gaze darkening.

The she-cat followed him and hissed. "I hate the Thunderpath. There's so many monsters."

"Same, but it's pretty calm now. Let's go." Rattlesnake meowed and quickly crossed it.

The she-cat followed him silently. *I should tell him. But what if he'll get angry? What if he'll abandon me? No, he said he would never. It would be pretty stupid.*

While she was thinking, she didn't notice that Rattlesnake stopped. She bumped into him and let out a screech as she fell on her back.

The brown tabby tom turned around, alarmed. "Nectar! Are you all right?"

"Yes, I'm fine. Thanks." Nectar sighed and got up. "Sorry, I wasn't looking."

"You don't seem like yourself today." Rattlesnake meowed, his gaze clouding with worry. He sat down. "Are you all right? Did something happen? Please, tell me."

Nectar hesitated and looked at her white paws. "I-"

She stopped, scared. She then took a deep breath and looked in Rattlesnake's amber eyes. "I'm expecting your kits."

Rattlesnake froze and stared at her, wide-eyed. "A-Are you serious?"

"Yes, I'm serious." The she-cat meowed and shut her eyes tightly, expecting to be yelled at.

"Oh, this is the best thing that ever happened to me!" Rattlesnake exclaimed and nuzzled Nectar. "I'm going to be a father!"

The she-cat opened her eyes, surprised. She let out a purr. "I thought you'd be angry."

"Angry? Why?" Rattlesnake tilted his head, confused.

"I don't know." Nectar sighed, then purred. "Anyway, let's think of some names for our kits."

"All right." Rattlesnake sat down, obviously excited. "For some reason, I really love the name Hiron. I think it sounds adorable."

"Then one of our kits will be called Hiron." Nectar purred. "And I like the name Meadow for a she-kit. Maybe Clover too."

"I love the names! And maybe another name could be Pine?" Rattlesnake asked, flicking his tail.

"All right. So far we have Hiron, Meadow, Clover, and Pine. But first, we should wait until the kits are born." Nectar meowed.

"Good idea. But no matter what happens, I promise to be a good father and a good mate." The brown tom meowed, purring.

"Same. I'll never let anything bad happen to our kits." Nectar purred. Then, she sat down next to Rattlesnake and looked down at the gorge. *One day, our kits will be on this same spot, admiring the gorge.*

Chapter 1

Hiron sat outside his den and looked around. Bushes were all around him, because the entrance to his den was right in the middle of a lot of bushes. He flicked his ears and looked around, scared.

"I'll find you!" A voice hissed, and he heard paw steps getting closer and closer to him. Hiron closed his eyes, being as quiet as possible.

"Found you!" A small, tortoiseshell-and-white she-kit jumped out of the bushes and pinned him down.

Hiron let out a screech.

"Stop being such a scaredy-cat!" The she-kit meowed and got off him.

"No fair! You took me by surprise!" Hiron wailed and got up, shaking his fur.

"But that's the meaning of hide-and-seek." The she-kit shrugged. "You should be the seeker if you get scared this easily."

"But I hate being the seeker!" Hiron protested.

"See? This is why it's no fun to play with you." The she-kit rolled her eyes.

"Meadow! Be nice to your brother!" Nectar, Hiron and Meadow's mother, hissed and sat close to Hiron. "Just because he's jumpy and gets scared fast, doesn't mean you can be rude to him. He's your brother!"

"Sorry, mother." Meadow looked at her paws. "But I want him to be braver."

"Then teach him to be brave." Rattlesnake purred and padded out of the den, dropping a bird. "Here, I thought you two would be hungry."

Hiron looked at the bird, wide-eyed. "It's so big and fat! Did you catch it?" He asked and immediately took a bite out of it.

"Yes." Rattlesnake nodded, purring.

Meadow looked at her father, her eyes sparkling. "Can we hunt, too? Please!"

"Maybe when you'll be older." Nectar meowed. "But for now, eat the bird."

"Aww!" Meadow huffed, but then crouched and ate the bird.

Hiron raised his head and looked at his father. "Dad? Can we go see the forest?"

Rattlesnake's gaze immediately darkened. "No."

"Why?" Hiron tilted his head.

"Because it's dangerous." Rattlesnake growled and sat down, looking directly at his kits, which startled Hiron. "Clan cats live there."

"Clan cats?" Meadow asked and stopped eating the bird, looking at her father.

"Yes. Clan cats are cats who live in groups. They aren't friendly to us, loners. I heard some loners got killed by Clan cats because they wanted to explore the forest." He hissed.

Hiron let out an alarmed meow and closed his eyes. "I don't want to get killed!"

"Don't worry, if you won't go in the forest, then you won't get killed." Nectar meowed and licked her son's head. "You're safe here."

Meadow huffed. "But I *won't* be killed! I'll fight any cat that tries to attack me!"

Hiron opened his eyes and looked at his sister, wide-eyed. "No, don't! I don't want you to die!"

Meadow let out an amused purr. "Oh, brother, I won't. No cat will dare set a paw on me! Just look at me!" She crouched and jumped as high as she could, clawing the air with her tiny sharp claws.

The black-and-white kit looked at his sister, amazed. "Wow! How do you jump that high?"

"Easy." Meadow meowed as she landed on her four paws. "I want to see you try!"

"All right." Hiron meowed and got up, flicking his tail. He then jumped as high as he could, but his legs scrambled everywhere. With a loud hiss, he fell on the ground on his belly.

Meadow started laughing and fell on her back. "Wow! That jump was so high, I bet you could catch every bird!" She meowed sarcastically.

Hiron looked at his white paws, ashamed, while his sister continued laughing.

"Meadow!" Nectar hissed and looked at her daughter. "I told you, be nice to your brother! If you want him to succeed, teach him!"

"All right, all right." Meadow shrugged and got up, trying to stop laughing. She looked at Hiron. "All right, so, when you jump, put all your strength in your back legs. Try to keep them as still as possible. And also, your tail- er, how about you try lower it?"

"I'll give it a try." Hiron mumbled. He lowered his tail and put all the strength he had in his back legs. With a snarl, he jumped right up in the air and tried to keep his legs straight. He then fell down on his four legs. He looked at his sister, surprised. "I did it!"

"He did it!" Meadow meowed and looked at her parents, as if she couldn't believe it. "He did it! Good job, brother!"

Hiron purred as his sister nuzzled him. "Thanks!"

"Good job, Hiron." Nectar purred and licked Hiron's ears.

"Hey! What about me? I taught him how to do that! Don't forget

about me!" Meadow protested.

Nectar sighed and licked Meadow's ears. "Of course, I didn't forget about you."

"Anyway, I'll go patrol our territory, just to make sure nobody dared to trespass." Rattlesnake meowed and got up, padding away.

"Mom, can we go, too?" Meadow asked, looking at her mother hopefully, but Nectar shook her head.

"No."

"Then can we go to the gorge?" Hiron asked hesitantly. "You and dad talk so much about it!"

Nectar shook her head again. "No. The gorge is beautiful, but kits can fall in the gorge easily."

"We'll be careful!" Meadow protested.

"My answer is still no." Nectar hissed. "The ground near the gorge is wet and muddy. You kits can fall easily. Especially that you play a lot."

"But we won't play! We'll be careful! Please!" Meadow promised.

"I said no." Nectar meowed, then sighed. "I don't want anything to happen to you two. Promise me you'll never go there until you're over six moons old, all right?"

"Promise." Meadow rolled her eyes.

"All right, promise." Hiron whispered.

"Good." Nectar purred. "Anyway, I'll go rest a little bit. You two can play around, all right?"

"Okay, mother!" Meadow meowed, but as soon as Nectar padded in the den, she turned around. "Hey, Hiron, do you want to go to the gorge?"

Hiron blinked. "What? But mother said-"

"It doesn't matter what mother said. I want to see the gorge, and we'll be careful!" Meadow meowed. "Or are you a scaredy-cat?"

"I'm not! I just listen to my mother." Hiron meowed.

"Scaredy-cat! Scaredy-cat!" Meadow teased, padding around her brother.

Hiron let out a hiss. "Fine! I'll come. I'm not a scaredy-cat."

"Finally!" Meadow meowed. "Now come on, follow me!"

As Hiron followed his sister toward the Thunderpath, he looked at his paws. *I hope nothing bad will happen to us.. but we'll be careful, and we'll be safe.*

Chapter 2

Hiron's ears twitched as he heard a noise in the distance. He stopped and sniffed the air. "Meadow?"

"What is it?" Meadow turned around to look at him.

"Don't you hear the noise?" Hiron whispered.

"What noise?" Meadow sighed and looked around, then shrugged. "I don't hear anything. You're probably just imagining things. Now follow me and stop being a scaredy-cat!"

"I'm not a scaredy-cat!" Hiron hissed and sprinted past Meadow, but then stopped before he stepped onto the Thunderpath.

"Come on, you slow snail!" Meadow ran past him and onto the Thunderpath.

Hiron let out a squeak as he heard the noise again, but this time it was louder. Something was yowling in the distance, and it kept getting closer and closer. It got so close that everything else went quiet. Meadow seemed to hear it too, because his sister suddenly stopped and looked to her left. She then let out a squeak.

A giant, blue creature was coming toward her, yowling angrily. Its paws were black and round. It made another sound, as loud as a thunder, as it started speeding up toward Meadow.

"Watch out!" Hiron yowled and, without thinking, ran forward and pushed Meadow to the other side. Then he sprinted after her right before the creature hit him.

"What was that?" Meadow coughed and raised her head, looking after the creature as it disappeared in the distance.

Hiron looked after it, shaking. "I have no idea."

Meadow looked at her brother admiringly. "You saved me! I bet

that creature would've squashed me if you hadn't been here. You're so brave, brother!"

Hiron's amber eyes light up, purring. *I'm brave! I'm not a scaredy-cat anymore!*

"Anyway, I think we should go back." Hiron meowed and turned around, but froze when he realized that they'd have to cross the Thunderpath again in order to get back.

Meadow sighed. "I thought you were brave! That creature obviously only walks on the Thunderpath, so it won't come after us. Now come on! Or are you a scaredy-cat again?"

"I'm not a scaredy-cat!" Hiron hissed and turned around, his fur bristling.

"All right, all right, calm down! Come on, I really want to see the gorge!" Meadow meowed and turned around, sprinting away.

Hiron looked past his shoulder, at his den, which was now just a couple of bushes in the distance. Then he looked forward and sprinted after his sister, then looked around. There was grass everywhere, and he couldn't see any Thunderpath near him, except for the one behind him. He squinted his eyes and looked to his left. He saw a tall, red building in the distance. *I don't see the forest dad talked about.. did he just make it up to scare us?*

Hiron let out a squeak as he tripped over a rock and fell on his belly. Meadow turned around, alarmed, but then broke into a laughter. "Oh, brother, you're so silly!"

Hiron got up and looked at his paws, embarrassed. "Good thing our parents aren't here to see us."

Meadow let out a giggle and nuzzled him. "You're right. Now come on, I hear water!"

"Do you?" Hiron sniffed the air and listened closely. Meadow was right, there was water somewhere ahead of them. And that was probably the gorge.

"Come on!" Meadow sprinted forward, and Hiron followed his sister. They passed a giant rock, and soon Meadow jumped on a fallen branch.

Hiron blinked. *How'd that get here? I don't see any trees around here.*

Meadow suddenly let out excited squeaks. "We're here! We're here!"

"Huh?" Hiron jumped next to his sister and looked in front of him. He then blinked, wide-eyed.

Right in front of their paws, the land suddenly stopped in front of an abyss, and continued on the other side, where Hiron saw trees. In the gap between the two lands, there was a river. Hiron carefully approached the edge and looked down. It was a deep gap, more deeper than Hiron thought. Right at the bottom, a river flowed peacefully, and a bit on the left, a short, but forever flowing water roared.

"We made it, Hiron! We made it! We're at the gorge!" Meadow purred and turned around, flicking her tail. "It's beautiful!"

"I know, but it seems dangerous." Hiron whispered and padded away from the edge. "We should go back, we've been away for a while."

Meadow sighed. "Hiron, I swear, you're so boring! Let's play here for a while, it's so beautiful!"

"Fine." Hiron shrugged. "What should we play?"

His sister didn't respond. Instead, she stared at him with her blue eyes. Hiron anxiously looked at his paws.

"Tag! You're it!" Meadow suddenly yowled and hit her brother's shoulder with one of her front white paws, and sprinted away.

Hiron raised his head and quickly sprinted after her.

Meadow let out a giggle and ran faster, trying to avoid getting caught by her brother, but she suddenly slipped on a twig. Hiron purred and touched her back with his paw. "Who's silly now?"

"Not fair!" Meadow complained and got up. "It's not my fault I don't know the land around here!"

"It's not that, you just can't accept the fact that you slipped." Heron purred.

"That's not true!" Meadow hissed, then padded back toward the gorge. Hiron let out a sigh and followed his sister.

The tortoiseshell-and-white she-kit jumped on a rock near the edge and Hiron jumped in front of her. He yawned. "What now?"

"Hmm.. oh, I know! Let's play hide and seek!" Meadow purred.

"Meadow, you know I hate that game!" Hiron complained. "We already played it today!"

His sister huffed. "Fine, we'll play gather-herbs-until-you-die-of-boredom, scaredy-cat."

"Hey! That game doesn't even exist!" Hiron hissed.

Meadow laughed. "That's the point, only boring cats would play that game."

"I'm not boring! Fine, we'll play hide and seek!" Hiron meowed, his voice turning into a whisper. He hated that game. He was the hider every single time, and Meadow always took him by surprise. And he absolutely *hated* to be the seeker, he felt so alone and scared, and Meadow could jump from behind a rock any time and scare him.

"You know what? I kind of want to hide." Meadow's meow snapped Hiron out of his thoughts. "Can you be the seeker?"

Hiron quickly opened his jaws to protest, but Meadow let out a sigh. "I forgot you're a scaredy-cat, I'm sorry. You can be the hider."

Hiron lashed his tail. "For the last time, Meadow, I'm not a scaredy-cat! I saved you from that creature!"

"I know, and I'm grateful for that." Meadow meowed, looking at her brother with a warm gaze, but then it turned to an indifferent

one. "But hide and seek is nothing compared to what you did, and you're too scared to play it!"

"Fine then, I'll be the seeker." Hiron huffed. "But after that, we'll go home."

"Fine, I'm hungry anyway." Meadow shrugged. "Come on, close your eyes and count!"

"All right." Hiron closed his eyes and started counting. The breeze ruffled his fur as he heard Meadow run away.

Suddenly, a scream echoed in the air. Hiron snapped open his eyes and looked around, trembling, but calmed down when he didn't see anything. *Meadow probably did that to scare me.*

Hiron got up and looked around, trying to guess where his sister was hiding, but he saw his parents running toward him.

He padded toward them, scared that they were going to yell at him. "H-Hi mom, hi dad, me and Meadow were just-"

Hiron gasped in surprise as Nectar's paw hit his face. He fell on his back and looked at his parents. His mother was staring right at him, hurt and angry.

"You monster! You killed Meadow! How could you?!"

Hiron's expression turned to a shocked one. He quickly got up. "W-What do you mean? S-She's just hiding!"

"Hiding?!" Rattlesnake yowled and unsheathed his claws. "We saw you push her off the edge!"

"What?" Hiron exclaimed and looked behind him, wide-eyed, then looked back at his parents. "I didn't! We were playing hide and seek and she ran away to hide! I was going to go find her, but then-"

"Shut up!" Nectar growled and unsheathed her claws. "I can't believe you're my son! You *killed* your own sister!"

Hiron's tail dropped. "But I swear I didn't! I can go get her now! I

don't think she's realizing that you-"

"Funny how you think you can still defend yourself." Nectar hissed, her blue eyes blazing with fury. "We both saw what you did, Hiron. I can't believe my son is a killer. But you know what? You're *not* my son. I'm not a murderer's mother."

Hiron stared at his mother, shocked by her answer. "B-But.. Meadow is fine.. r-right?"

Nectar growled and let out a wail, then turned around and padded away. Rattlesnake looked after her, worried, then looked back at Hiron, baring his teeth. "Come on. We'll talk more about this home. But don't think we'll forgive you, murderer."

Hiron looked after his parents, who were walking back home. He looked around him, expecting to see Meadow sprinting toward him and yelling that it was a prank, and his parents rushing back at them, but nothing happened. Hiron was standing, alone, with the gorge flowing behind him and his parents disappearing in the distance.

Hiron let out a wail and fell to the ground. *Meadow can't be dead.. she's not.. dead.. r-right? This is all just a dream..*

He got up, shaking and wailing, then followed his parents. *No, Meadow isn't dead, this is just a misunderstanding. I'll search for her soon.*

Chapter 3

A week passed since Meadow and Hiron played hide and seek by the gorge. Meadow still didn't come back, and Hiron's parents were treating him as if he was just a lost kit they found and they were forced to take care of him.

Hiron sat in a corner of his den, shaking, and looked at his paws. They weren't even white anymore. His formerly white paws were now a dirty, gray color. His fur was all ruffled up and full of dirt. His mother didn't wash him every day like she used to, and he was too scared and confused to wash himself. His parents didn't even bring him food anymore. He had to hunt for himself.

Hiron raised his head as he heard paw steps, and saw his father enter the den with a rabbit in his jaws. He looked at it, hungry, but Rattlesnake just growled at him and approached Nectar with the prey.

Hiron sighed and got up. "I'll go hunt for myself."

His parents just snorted and quietly talked to each other, which hurt Hiron, but he just padded outside, his heart aching. *But I don't understand what I did! Or where Meadow is.. I was done with getting called a scaredy-cat by her, but.. I miss her..*

Hiron let out a wail, but sprinted away from the entrance to the den. Every time he wailed, his parents told him that he shouldn't be grieving, and called him a murderer. *But I'm not a murderer! I didn't kill anyone.. Meadow, where are you? Please, come home!*

Hiron then looked past the Thunderpath, toward the place where the gorge was. Maybe Meadow was still hiding somewhere, waiting for Hiron to find her.

Suddenly, he turned around and ran on the Thunderpath toward the other side. He didn't care if his parents would be mad, all he

wanted to do was find Meadow and bring her home.

Once he stepped on the other side, he looked around. He saw the building in the distance, the fallen branch in front of him, and heard the water flowing from the gorge. *It's exactly how it was when me and Meadow came here.*

"Meadow?" He called his sister's name and ran toward the gorge, flowers brushing against his fur. "Meadow, where are you? It's me, Hiron! Come home, please! The game ended a while ago!"

But what if she left her hiding spot to come looking for me, and got lost? What if something found her and killed her? Grief seemed to claw Hiron's heart. *Oh, Meadow, I'm so sorry if anything happened to you! This is all my fault!*

He ran toward the place where he last saw Meadow and jumped on a rock, looking down. The gorge was still flowing peacefully, and there was no movement near him. Hiron sniffed the air, trying to catch his sister's scent, but to no avail. His belly rumbled, but he ignored it. Finding Meadow was more important to him than catching prey. *I'll just hunt later, I guess. Or eat berries again.*

Suddenly, he heard paw steps behind him. He perked his ears and turned around. "Meadow?! Meadow, is that you? Meadow!"

A tall white she-cat jumped out of a bush and looked at Hiron, confused. "Are you lost, little kit?"

Hiron dropped his gaze and shook his head. "No.. I'm sorry, I was looking for someone."

"And for who, exactly?" The she-cat tilted her head.

"Meadow, my sister." Hiron meowed and looked up, hurt. "I haven't seen her for a while, and my parents say she died and that I pushed her in the gorge, but I know she's not dead! This is a misunderstanding!"

The she-cat pawed the ground anxiously. "Where did you last see her?"

"Over there." Hiron pointed with his tail toward the rock where he and Meadow were about to play hide and seek.

"That's dangerously close to the gorge." The she-cat meowed, looking at the rock, then back at Hiron. "So you didn't push her in the gorge?"

"No!" Hiron exclaimed. "I would never! I'm looking for her now. Can you help me look for her?"

The she-cat hesitated and looked around. "I-I'm sorry, kit, but I think she's-"

"Hiron!"

Hiron raised his head as he heard his name. He expected to see Meadow, running toward him, but instead he saw his parents, growling and hissing. *Oh no.*

Hiron fell to the ground and covered his face with his paws, preparing to get screamed at.

He let out a cry as claws slashed his shoulder. He looked up and wailed as his mother attacked him. "How dare you come here?!"

"Hey, leave the kit alone!" The white she-cat growled and stepped between Hiron and his mother. "What did he do to you?"

"This is none of your business!" Rattlesnake spat, arching his back. "Leave, loner!"

"No." She hissed, looking directly at Rattlesnake. "You're hurting a kit. And for what? What did he do?"

"He's a monster!" Nectar suddenly growled. "He killed our daughter!"

Hiron let out a wail and hid his face with his paws again. Rattlesnake took a step toward him, but the white she-cat blocked his way. "You mean, your daughter *and* his sister? He didn't. A kit can't kill another kit, and especially not a sibling!"

"You didn't see what happened! He did!" Nectar hissed and clawed the white she-cat's muzzle. "Now go!"

The loner growled, and then looked at Hiron, her gaze filled with sorrow, then sprinted away. Hiron closed his eyes tighter.

"Why did you come here?!" Nectar spat in Hiron's face, unsheathing her claws again. "Let me guess! You came here to search for Meadow, trying to trick us that you didn't do anything? We're not stupid!"

"B-But I'm really searching for her!" Hiron protested and opened his eyes, just for Nectar to claw his muzzle. He let out a wail, trembling.

Rattlesnake looked at Nectar for a second, and then nudged Hiron with his paw. "Come on, let's go home. We have to talk."

Hiron got up, shaking, and let out a wail as he realized he was bleeding. *My.. my parents attacked me..*

"Stop wailing and come on!" Rattlesnake growled. Hiron raised his head, shaking, and saw that his parents almost reached the Thunderpath. Nectar was already crossing it. Hiron hesitated, then limped toward his father, hissing from pain. He didn't know that a small cut would hurt this much.

Rattlesnake snorted and crossed the Thunderpath before Hiron could reach him, so he had to hurry up. When he got there, he looked both ways, listened carefully and limped to the other side.

His parents padded inside the den, so Hiron followed them, and let out a pained hiss as he brushed his wounded shoulder against the wall. He sat next to it and didn't dare to look at his parents.

"First you kill your sister, and now you go looking for her, trying to trick us?!" Nectar suddenly growled, unsheathing his claws. "You're an embarrassment! A murderer!"

Hiron let out a wail and looked at his paws, wishing he was deaf. He should've never agreed to go to the gorge with Meadow. But it wasn't her fault, it was his. *I should've knew something bad was going*

to happen!

"You know what?" Nectar hissed. "Me and Rattlesnake already decided what to do with you. Get out."

Hiron suddenly looked at his mother, wide-eyed. "What?"

"You're a murderer, Hiron." Rattlesnake growled and took a step forward. "We're not keeping you here. If we do, maybe you'll kill us too once you're old enough."

"B-But.. I can't even hunt!" Hiron protested, shaking.

"You survived until now, so you'll be fine. Now go." Nectar growled.

"But.. where will I go?" Hiron whispered.

"I said, go!" Nectar spat and sprinted toward Hiron, clawing his muzzle.

Hiron wailed and closed his eyes, then he limped outside. He left the den and panted, shaking. *But.. I don't understand..*

Hiron limped away, then crossed the Thunderpath. He had no idea where to go, and he was still shocked. *But I didn't kill Meadow! I'm sure she's fine! And I'm their son.. w-why?*

Once he was on the other side of the Thunderpath, Hiron let out a loud wail and collapsed. He was hungry, thirsty, wounded, and confused. He needed Meadow back. He wanted his sister back. *What happened to her, and what happened to my old life, when everything was fine?*

Chapter 4

The sun was starting to set when Hiron limped next to the tall building he saw when he was going toward the gorge. He looked at it, exhausted. It was way taller than his den, and it was made from red stone. There were a few holes in the red stone. He padded closer to them and realized he could look inside. He tried to get in, but blinked when he couldn't. He pawed around the hole. *There's something here blocking the way in, but I can't see it.. I don't understand..*

Hiron limped away, his wounds burning. He passed the tall building and looked back at it, and then he saw an entrance. He was about to turn around and go in, when he saw a movement there. He froze. *Someone lives there.. I'd better not go, then.*

He looked in front of him and let out a shocked meow. Ahead of him, past a moor was a forest. He suddenly remembered what his father told him about Clan cats who live in the forest and aren't friendly to loners. He wanted to back down and run back home.

Wait.. I don't have a home anymore. Hiron realized and shivered, looking at the forest. After a moment, he shook his head and turned around, padding away. *I don't want to get killed.*

He raised his head and looked around, confused where he was. He saw the building in front of him, but it was far away. The forest was somewhere behind him, the leaves from the trees rustling. Right now, Hiron was on a moor, which stretched between the forest and the building. The gorge wasn't far away from him, either. If he turned to the left and took a few steps ahead, then he would reach the edge.

Hiron limped toward a small rock and jumped on it, grunting. He then licked his wounded shoulder. He flinched, but continued to lick it, determined to stop the bleeding.

Suddenly, he heard paw steps. Hiron stopped and looked in front of

him, squinting his eyes. "M-Meadow?"

Hiron flinched when someone jumped next to him. He let out a screech and fell on his back.

"Hi!"

Hiron looked up and saw a small, black-and-cream she-kit. She had a cream head, her black fur was covered with cream spots, and her green eyes were round with curiosity.

"P-Please don't kill me!" Hiron exclaimed and closed his eyes shut, shivering.

The kit tilted her head and jumped down. "Why would I kill you?"

Hiron opened his eyes and looked at her, shivering. "Y-You're a Clan cat, aren't you?"

"Obviously." She meowed and raised one of her front paws and licked it, then blinked when she saw how messy Hiron's fur was. "Woah, are loners always this messy?"

"Huh? Oh, no, I've just had a bad day." Hiron meowed and tried to hide his wounds from her.

"Right.. well, I'm Cougarkit!" She purred, flicking her tail. "Who are you?"

"Uh, I'm Hiron." He meowed.

"Hiron? That's a weird name." Cougarkit blinked, then stretched. "Anyway, it's getting dark. Shouldn't you go home?"

"Uh, I don't have a home, actually." Hiron whispered, sighing. *Not anymore.*

Cougarkit stared at him, wide-eyed. "Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.. Hey! Maybe you could join WindClan!"

Hiron blinked. "Join.. what Clan?"

"WindClan!" Cougarkit puffed out her chest. "I live there, and it's amazing! I'm sure Rosestar would let you join!"

"Rosestar?" Hiron tilted his head.

"Oh, right. Rosestar is our leader." Cougarkit explained. "Do you want to join us?"

"I'm not sure. I'm looking for someone." Hiron meowed.

"Who?" Cougarkit tilted her head.

"She's called Meadow." Hiron meowed. "She's a tortoiseshell-and-white she-kit, as small as us, and she's my sister. I haven't seen her for a while."

Cougarkit looked around, blinking. "I haven't seen a tortoiseshell-and-white cat before, sorry, but anyway, you should join us. You have no home, you seem hungry, and.." She stopped, sniffing the air. "Are you bleeding?"

"W-What? No!" Hiron meowed and turned away from her, trying to hide his wounds.

"I smell blood, though. Why are you bleeding?" Cougarkit tilted her head.

Hiron didn't respond. Instead, he looked at his paws.

"So?"

"My parents attacked me." Hiron blurted out and closed his eyes.

Cougarkit let out a shriek. "Why would anyone attack their kit? That's wrong!"

"I'm not sure. They were saying that I.. killed my sister." Hiron meowed, then looked back at Cougarkit. "But I swear I didn't!"

Cougarkit tilted her head. "You don't seem like a cat who would kill anyone. Especially the fact that you're a kit. Your parents are weird."

"They used to love me and my sister.." Hiron sighed.

"Well, yeah, they *used* to." Cougarkit meowed. "I'm sorry to hear what happened to you, but you should really join WindClan. You can't just go on like this, living without a home."

Hiron hesitated. *Should I join them? My father said that Clan cats aren't friendly to loners, but.. Cougarkit seems nice, and maybe the others are too.. I'm hungry and thirsty as well..*

Hiron sighed. "All right, I'll join."

Cougarkit purred. "Trust me, you won't regret it! You'll like it here, in WindClan, now come on!" She meowed, then sprinted away. Hiron quickly limped after her.

Cougarkit led him through the moor, then disappeared in a tunnel. Hiron followed her, and when he exited the tunnel, he looked around, wide-eyed.

They were now in a hollow. There were cats everywhere, and there was a giant rock in the middle of the hollow, and a few dens by the edge of the hollow. Cougarkit turned to look at him. "Here we are!"

"Cougarkit, there you are!" A black-and-silver she-cat exclaimed and sprinted toward them. Hiron shivered and looked at her, scared.

"We searched everywhere for you! Where have you been?" She hissed and licked Cougarkit's ears, but she pulled away from her.

"Mom, I'm fine!"

"Well, don't-" She suddenly stopped when she noticed Hiron. The black-and-white tom shivered and looked at her. "Who's that?"

"This is Hiron, he wants to join WindClan!" Cougarkit sat next to the tom.

"Oh, StarClan! What happened to you?" The she-cat sniffed Hiron, and he flinched when she touched his wounds with her nose. "You're wounded! Poor thing."

"Skyflower, did you find her?" A tall cream she-cat padded toward them. Hiron shivered more.

Skyflower looked at her and nodded. "Yes, Rosestar. She also brought back a kit who wants to join us."

"Oh?" Rosestar looked past her, at Hiron. She blinked. "What's your name?"

"H-Hiron." He whispered.

"Hiron." Rosestar crouched to examine the kit, then blinked. "You're wounded, and you seem to be starving. Skyflower, please bring him something to eat, and I'll get Wolfstripe."

Skyflower nodded and padded away, while Rosestar padded toward one of the dens. Hiron blinked and looked at Cougarkit. "What's going on?"

"They feel bad for you." Cougarkit whispered. "Rosestar wants to bring Wolfstripe, our medicine cat, to examine you."

"How many cats are there?" Hiron asked and looked around at the other cats. He then realized that most of them were watching him, so he looked at his paws, anxious.

"It's fine, don't worry!" Cougarkit meowed. "WindClan has a lot of cats. Enough to protect us from the other Clans!"

"Other Clans?" Hiron blinked. "How many Clans are there?"

"Four." Cougarkit meowed. "There's ThunderClan, RiverClan, WindClan, and ShadowClan. The other three Clans live in the forest, while us, WindClan, live on the moor."

"Oh." Hiron blinked, then he saw Rosestar approach them with a dark gray tabby tom, who was carrying herbs. Skyflower was also padding toward them, carrying a mouse.

"Here, eat this." Skyflower dropped the mouse.

Hiron sniffed the mouse, anxious, then quickly ate it. He purred as

he chewed it. "It's delicious!"

The medicine cat - Wolfstripe - sniffed Hiron's wounds. "Those are pretty deep. Where are your parents?"

"They attacked him! Can you believe that parents can actually attack their own kits?" Cougarkit answered for Hiron.

Wolfstripe went quiet. He exchanged glances with Rosestar, then patched up Hiron's wounds with herbs. The kit flinched.

"You want to join us, right?" Rosestar asked.

Hiron nodded.

"All right then, but you'll be a kit until you're old enough to be an apprentice. How old are you?" The leader asked.

"U-Uh, I'm two moons old." Hiron meowed.

Cougarkit blinked and looked at him. "I'm two moons old, too! We'll become apprentices together!"

Hiron purred. Once Wolfstripe was done, Rosestar jumped on the tall rock which was in the middle of WindClan's camp.

"Let all cats old enough to run the moor gather beneath the Tallrock for a Clan meeting!" She yowled.

"That's the meeting call, come on!" Cougarkit whispered and hurried toward the rock. Hiron followed her and sat next to Cougarkit. He shivered when everyone else gathered around, looking at him and whispering to each other.

"We have found Cougarkit. She left camp, again." Rosestar sighed. "Skyflower, I hope you'll punish her."

"I will, Rosestar." Skyflower nodded.

"Aww!" Cougarkit snorted.

"While she was out, Cougarkit also found a loner. He was starving

when she found him. He also had a few wounds, but Wolfstripe patched them." Rosestar meowed. "He will, however, join WindClan. Hiron, step forward."

The other cats whispered to each other more as Hiron stepped forward, shaking.

"Rosestar, are you sure that's a good idea?"

Hiron looked around to see who spoke, and he saw a yellow-and-white she-cat look at her leader, hissing. "He's a loner, he could be in a group! They might have sent him to spy on us!"

"He's a loner, Beesun. Loners don't travel in groups." Rosestar hissed. "And even if he was in a group, would his own group really hurt and starve him just for him to spy on us?"

The other cats whispered to each other again, and Beesun snorted, sitting back down. Rosestar coughed to get everyone's attention. "Anyway, let's continue."

Rosestar looked back at Hiron with a warm gaze. "From this day forward, until you earn your apprentice name, you will be known as Heronkit. I trust that Cougarkit and the others will teach you our ways, and I hope that everyone will treat you like a normal Clanmate."

I'm in WindClan now! I'm Heronkit! He thought, purring. He was for sure going to miss his parents though, or at least his life before the accident, but he knew that he was safe here.

"Does any queen want to take care of him?" Rosestar asked.

Skyflower stepped forward. "I will, Rosestar. I'm already taking care of a kit, so a second one shouldn't be that hard. Besides, both Nightshine and Cinderstream are expecting, and I'm the only queen who already kitted, so I think I'm the best choice."

Rosestar nodded, grateful. "Thank you, Skyflower. Meeting dismissed, then." She meowed and jumped down.

"Welcome to WindClan, Heronkit!" Cougarkit purred and turned to

him, flicking her tail. "Rosestar gave you a nice name!"

"But why couldn't I keep my loner name?" Heronkit tilted his head.

"Because you're a Clan cat now." Skyflower meowed and sat down, giving Heronkit a few licks on his head. He purred, as he forgot how it felt to be cared of. "You'll understand soon."

"Can I show him around camp?" Cougarkit looked up, but Skyflower shook her head.

"Not yet. Heronkit's fur is a mess, and I'm sure he's tired."

Heronkit hesitated, then meowed. "I'm also hungry, but I don't want to eat too much of your prey."

Suddenly, he heard a snort. He raised his head and saw Beesun, the cat who spoke earlier, stop by them. "So that's why he joined! He was starving, and he only wants our prey!"

Skyflower growled. "Leave him alone, Beesun! He's just a kit who was attacked by his parents, so they obviously didn't care for him. How can he not be hungry?"

Beesun snorted and walked away. Heronkit looked after her, anxious. "I don't think she likes me."

"Don't worry, Beesun has bees in her brain, and that's why she has 'Bee' in her name." Cougarkit snorted. "Anyway, I'm going to go play, so see you later!"

"See you." Heronkit meowed and looked after Cougarkit, who walked away, then looked at Skyflower. "What now?"

"Follow me, I'll take you to the nursery where you can rest." Skyflower meowed.

Heronkit nodded and got up. He followed her, yawning. *I'm in WindClan now.. My father was wrong, these cats don't seem hostile at all. Cougarkit is right, I will like it here.*

Allegiance Update: 1

WindClan

Leader**: Rosestar** - Cream she-cat with green eyes

Deputy: **Hawkgrowl** - Brown tom with black stripes, a white muzzle and a cream belly

Medicine cat: **Wolfstripe** - Dark gray tom with a white muzzle, belly, paws and black stripes

Apprentice, Cloudpaw - Deaf white she-cat with blue eyes

Warriors: **Brownbranch** - Brown tabby tom

Beesun - Yellow-and-white she-cat with black stripes

Badgerleap - Black tom with white stripes on his face

Apprentice, Mushroompaw - Cream tom with brown and black spots and a white belly

Otterbounce - Dark brown tom with green eyes

Apprentice, Vinepaw - Gray tom with cream spots and a white belly

Whitelion - Tall white tom with dark amber eyes

Frostbreeze - Fluffy gray-and-white she-cat with blue eyes

Apprentice, Dovepaw - Gray-and-cream she-cat with green eyes

Sandypelt - Cream tabby tom

Queens: **Skyflower** - Black-and-silver she-cat with blue eyes. Mother to Otterbounce's kit: Cougarkit, a black she-kit with a light brown head, spots and belly, a black ear and a cream ear with green eyes. Nursing Heronkit, a black-and-white tom with amber eyes

Nightshine - Black-and-white she-cat with blue eyes. Expecting Whitelion's kits

Cinderstream - Pale gray tabby she-cat with a white belly. Expecting Badgerleap's kits

Elders: **Volehiss** - Brown tom with a cream belly and white stripes

Poppyflight - Brown-and-white she-cat with a ginger face

ThunderClan

Leader: **Beetlestar** - Brown-and-white tabby tom

Deputy: **Gingerflame** - Dark ginger tom with amber eyes

Medicine cat: **Rainsong** - Gray-and-silver spotted she-cat

Warriors: **Acornfall** - Ginger-and-brown she-cat with a white belly and paws

Tigerfrost - Dark brown tabby tom with white paws and a cream belly

Apprentice, Twigpaw - Pale brown she-cat with green eyes

Cherryleaf - Fluffy ginger-and-white she-cat with green eyes

Apprentice, Smokepaw - Pale gray tom with blue eyes

Thornstrike - Golden-brown tom with black stripes

Lilydream - White she-cat with silver stripes

Apprentice, Goldenpaw - Golden tabby she-cat

Flowershade - Black-and-white speckled she-cat with blue eyes

Queens: **Berrybush** - Brown-and-cream she-cat with green eyes. Mother to Tigerfrost's kits: Maplekit, a pale cream she-kit with brown stripes, and Pinekit, a dark brown tabby tom with a cream belly

ShadowClan

Leader: **Crowstar** - Black tom with a gray belly and paws

Deputy: **Spiderthorn** - Black and reddish-brown tom with amber eyes

Medicine cat: **Silverash** - Silver-and-white she-cat with pale blue eyes

Apprentice, Foxpaw - Ginger-and-white tom with black legs

Warriors: **Hazelberry** - Gray, brown and white she-cat with green eyes

Tinyshadow - Small black tom

Apprentice, Stempaw - Ginger-and-white tabby tom

Mousefang - Gray tom with a black tail and blue eyes

Eaglefall - Ginger-and-brown tom with a white muzzle and belly

Sunnyheart - Tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat

Owlcry - Brown she-cat with green eyes

Apprentice, Ivypaw - White she-cat with brown dapples and blue eyes

Oaktail - Pale brown tom with amber eyes

Antscreech - Black tom with dark ginger dapples

Elders: **Spikehiss** - Dark brown tom with spiky fur, black stripes

and a white face

RiverClan

Leader: **Shimmerstar** - Silver she-cat with white spots and blue eyes

Deputy: **Splashpelt** - Brown tom with gray stripes and a white belly

Medicine cat: **Jaymoon** - Black-and-gray tabby tom

Warriors: **Bearcloud** - Black tom with a stump for a tail, yellow eyes and a white muzzle

Stonefall - Gray tom

Apprentice, Streampaw - White she-cat with silver paws

Eelstrike - Black she-cat with white stripes and amber eyes

Brackenfall - Dark ginger tom with white paws and a black-striped tail

Echolight - Fluffy dark gray she-cat with a white belly and paws

Apprentice, Leopardpaw - Golden tom with black spots and amber eyes

Birchsong - Dark brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

Blackstream - Black tom with gray stripes and blue eyes

Apprentice, Honeypaw - Golden-and-cream tabby she-cat

Queens: **Amberdawn** - Cream-and-white tabby she-cat with amber eyes. Mother to Brackenfall's kits: Flamekit, a ginger tom with blue eyes, Mosskit, a ginger-and-cream she-kit with a white belly and amber eyes, and Duskkit, a brown-and-cream tom

Cats Outside Clans

Rattlesnake - Brown tom with black stripes and a long, white tail

Nectar - Black-and-cream she-cat

Chapter 5

A few days passed since Heronkit joined WindClan. His fur was once again glossy and clean, his wounds were completely healed and he wasn't hungry and scared anymore. However, there was one more thing that was troubling him: Meadow's disappearance.

Heronkit sprinted out of the nursery, breathing in the fresh air of the morning. He looked past his shoulder. Cougarkit was still deep asleep, curled next to her mother, Skyflower. The black-and-silver queen had been very kind to him, and the other cats have been slowly starting to treat him like a Clanmate. Beesun, however, hasn't.

"Seems like the lost loner woke up early." Beesun snorted, walking past him. "Try not to eat too much fresh-kill, rat-eater."

Heronkit looked at his paws, hurt. Why didn't Beesun like him? *Did I do something wrong?*

"For StarClan's sake, Beesun! Leave him alone!"

Heronkit raised his head and saw a fluffy, cream tom with brown and black spots. His green eyes were fixed on Beesun.

"Don't tell me you trust him, Mushroompaw!" Beesun hissed.

The apprentice shrugged. "Maybe I do, but so what? He's just a kit! What do you think he'll do? Steal all our fresh-kill, ruin all our herbs and leave?"

Beesun snorted and walked away, flicking her tail in annoyance.

Mushroompaw rolled his eyes and turned around. "Excuse her, Heronkit. Has she been like this since the day you joined?"

The black-and-white kit sadly nodded. "I really don't understand why. Is there something wrong with me?"

Mushroompaw immediately shook his head and looked after the yellow-and-white tabby she-cat. "No, there's nothing wrong with you. If there's a cat that has a problem, it's Beesun. She always has a problem with outsiders, even if they're just kits."

"But why?" Heronkit tilted his head.

"I have no idea, but I don't care enough to ask her. It's her problem." Mushroompaw shrugged and looked at Heronkit. "By the way, my name is Mushroompaw. I'm Badgerleap's apprentice."

"Oh? Is Badgerleap the same as Beesun?" Heronkit asked, looking toward the sleek, black tom with white markings on his face, similar to a badger's.

Mushroompaw laughed. "Badgerleap is completely different from Beesun! He's super kind and understanding. He hasn't been rude to you, has he?"

Heronkit shook his head. "I don't think he even talked to me, actually."

"Oh? Well, that'll change." Mushroompaw purred and looked toward his mentor. "Badgerleap!"

The black tom turned toward his apprentice. He gave a nod to Otterbounce, the cat he was talking to, and rushed toward them. "Hello, Mushroompaw. Are you ready to train?"

"Not yet. Heronkit said you never talked to him!"

"Heronkit?" Badgerleap looked at the small kit. "Oh, yes! You're the kit who joined us, right?"

Heronkit tilted his head. *Wasn't he at the meeting?* "Uh, yes."

As if Badgerleap read his thoughts, he shook his head. "I wasn't at the meeting. I was out on a hunting patrol."

"Hunting patrol?" Heronkit tilted his head.

Mushroompaw nodded. "A hunting patrol is a patrol formed of

warriors and apprentices who go hunt."

"And one day we'll be in one!" Cougarkit suddenly exclaimed and jumped on Heronkit, pinning him down.

The small kit let out a surprised shriek. "Cougarkit, you scared me!"

The she-kit smirked and took a few steps backwards. "What can I say? I'm great at surprising cats."

Heronkit rolled his eyes and got up, shaking his fur. Cougarkit was the kit that found him when he ventured on WindClan's territory, and she was the one who brought him to the camp. She had been kind to him and played with him. She even explained the Clan ways to him.

"Anyways, we should go." Badgerleap meowed and looked at his apprentice. "Come on, Mushroompaw!"

"All right. See you later, Heronkit!" Mushroompaw meowed and ran after his mentor, who was already leaving the camp.

Heronkit stretched and looked at Cougarkit. "What should we do now?"

Cougarkit shrugged. "No idea."

The black-and-white kit looked around the camp when he saw a white she-cat leave the medicine cat's den. She had dark blue eyes and a long tail. Heronkit tilted his head. "Who's that?"

Cougarkit looked toward the she-cat. "Oh, that's Cloudpaw! She's our deaf medicine cat apprentice."

"She's deaf?" Heronkit asked, surprised.

"Yeah! That means she can't hear." Cougarkit meowed, following the deaf medicine cat apprentice with her green eyes. "Isn't that horrible?"

"It is." Heronkit nodded, shivering. His thoughts ran to Meadow, his sister that disappeared a long time ago when he was playing

hide and seek with her near the gorge. What happened to her? *What if she became deaf?*

No. Heronkit shook his head. *Maybe she's back at our den!*

Then, Heronkit froze. *Back at our den..* Ever since the day Meadow disappeared, his parents had been treating him horrible, eventually kicking him out of their den. He shivered. *Cats have been saying that she's dead.. is she really..?*

Heronkit hesitated, then looked at the black-and-brown she-kit next to him. "Hey, Cougarkit?"

"Yeah?"

"Do you know about the gorge?"

Cougarkit nodded. "Yes, what about it?"

"Have cats.. died there?"

Cougarkit suddenly shivered and shifted uncomfortably. "Yes, they have. My grandmother drowned in the gorge. She was walking near it when she slipped and fell."

Heronkit felt a shiver down his spine. "R-Remember my sister?"

"Meadow?" Cougarkit asked.

Heronkit nodded. "Yes, Meadow. I was playing with her near the gorge. We were playing hide and seek and I closed my eyes to count, then I heard a scream. When I opened my eyes she was gone, and ever since then cats have been saying that she died. Do you think that she's.. dead?"

Cougarkit looked at her paws. "I.. I think she is."

Heronkit couldn't help but wail. "So my sister is dead.. and I killed her."

Cougarkit stared at him, her eyes widening. "No, you didn't! She slipped!"

"But I accepted to go to the gorge with her!" Heronkit wailed, his legs trembling. "Maybe if I insisted to stay home.."

"Listen." The black-and-brown she-kit sighed, her eyes clouding with worry. "It's not your fault. Meadow just wanted to explore and she chose the most dangerous place. Even if she went alone, she would've probably still slipped. You couldn't control that."

"But now she's dead! I won't see her ever again!" Heronkit wailed, lying down and hiding his face with his front paws.

"You will." Cougarkit sighed and lay down in front of him. "Have you heard about StarClan?"

Heronkit didn't respond.

Cougarkit sighed. "StarClan is a place where dead cats go. For example, when a cat dies, their spirit leaves to join StarClan and watches over the cats they left behind. I'm not sure if that counts for outsiders too, but your sister still has to be somewhere, right? Maybe there's a StarClan for loners! I'm sure she's watching over you."

"Y-You think so?" Heronkit raised his head, still shaking.

"Yes!" Cougarkit purred, then got up and gently nudged his shoulder with her paw. "Now get up! I didn't wake up to hear you cry!"

Heronkit softly purred. "Right, right."

He then heard paw steps. He raised his head and saw Cloudpaw approach them. She tilted her head and rolled a moss-ball toward them, as if asking if they wanted to play with it.

Cougarkit energetically nodded, her eyes sparkling. Cloudpaw purred and turned around, padding toward Wolfstripe, her mentor.

Heronkit hit the moss-ball with his paw. "What's this?"

"It's a moss-ball. Kits usually play with it, and it's pretty fun!" Cougarkit explained and started rolling the moss-ball around, then

rolled it away from Heronkit. "Come on, you slow snail! Try to take it from me!"

Heronkit laughed and, shaking his head as if he was chasing away sadness, ran after Cougarkit, his amber eyes fixed on the moss-ball. "I'll catch it!"

He then jumped on Cougarkit, pinning her down. The she-kit let out a shriek as she fell on her side. Heronkit jumped off her and put a paw over the moss-ball. "I caught it!"

"Not fair!" Cougarkit protested and got up. "You're supposed to take the moss-ball away, not pin me down!"

Heronkit purred and sat down. "Cougarkit?"

"Yes?"

"Thank you."

Cougarkit tilted her head. "For what?"

"For calming me down earlier." Heronkit meowed. "I'll miss Meadow, though."

Cougarkit purred. "Any time! Meadow sounds like she was a fun sister."

Heronkit nodded. "She was, but you're fun, too. I know we're not real siblings, but we're friends. Best friends, actually."

The black-and-brown she-kit looked at him, surprised, as if she didn't expect to hear that, but then purred. "Yes, best friends! Nothing will break our friendship."

Chapter 6

Heronkit raised his head toward the sky as stars began to appear. He then suddenly remembered when Cougarkit told him about StarClan. *She's not sure if outsiders go there when they die, but maybe Skyflower knows! Or the elders!*

The tom looked toward Cougarkit, who was playing with a leaf. Satisfied, he turned around and padded toward the nursery, the cold breeze of the night ruffling his fur. He shivered, then stopped. He didn't shiver because he was cold. *I'm being watched.*

Heronkit instantly spun around and saw two amber eyes looking at him from near the Tallrock, in the shadows. He pawed the ground anxiously. "Uh.. hello?"

The cat didn't respond. A tall, brown tabby tom with a cream belly padded out of the shadows and looked at him. He snorted and whispered something that Heronkit didn't hear, then flicked his tail and turned around, padding away.

Heronkit tilted his head, confused. *Who was that?*

"That's Hawkgrowl, dear."

Heronkit looked past his shoulder and saw Skyflower approach him. The black-and-silver queen sat next to him and curled her tail around him. "He's the Clan deputy."

"Why did he look at me like that?" Heronkit asked and looked at her.

Skyflower looked after the tom, who disappeared in the warriors' den. "I have no idea, but don't worry about it. I'll speak to him about it. Anyway, get Cougarkit and go in the nursery, I'll be there soon. It's time you two sleep."

Heronkit nodded and got up. He was about to call Cougarkit when he suddenly remembered what he wanted to ask Skyflower. He looked at her, but grunted when he saw that she already disappeared in the warriors' den.

"Did mother ask about me?" Cougarkit suddenly meowed and padded toward him.

Heronkit looked at her and nodded. "Yes, she wants us in the nursery."

Cougarkit snorted. "I'm not tired!"

Heronkit shrugged. "That's what our mother told us."

"Fine." The she-kit sighed and padded in the nursery.

Heronkit hesitated before following her and looked toward the warriors' den. *I don't like the way Hawkgrowl looked at me.. Does he not like me, either?*

He then looked toward the exit of the camp. He squinted his eyes, hesitating. Ever since the day he joined WindClan, he was told he wasn't allowed out of camp until he was an apprentice. *I could leave the den any time I wanted when I was a loner.. surely nothing bad would happen if I go outside for a bit?*

Heronkit looked around the camp for a last time, making sure no one was watching him, then sneaked toward the exit of the camp. *I need to feel the grass under my paws again!*

Heronkit hesitated, then sprinted through the gorse tunnel. When he was out of camp, he looked around, shivering. The night breeze was much colder outside, but he didn't turn back. *I just want to stretch my legs for a little bit and then I'll go back*, he comforted himself.

He blinked as a blue butterfly landed on his nose. It moved a bit, and Heronkit giggled as it tickled him, and he shook his head. The butterfly instantly flew away into the night, toward the forest, and Heronkit looked after it, his tail flicking. *Well, goodbye, butterfly!*

He padded around, relieved to feel grass under his paws again. He ran around and jumped on a rock, purring. The breeze ruffled his fur and he looked down. He instantly shrieked and backed off, tucking his tail between his legs. At a long distance underneath him flowed the gorge.

My sister fell there.. Heronkit gulped, then turned around and padded away.

After a while, when Heronkit thought it was enough, he wanted to go back to camp, but instead he tilted his head. He only saw the moor everywhere around him, with some rocks rising a few tail-lengths away from him. The entrance to the camp was nowhere to be seen.

Uh-oh, Heronkit thought, afraid. He looked around and tried to recognize something, but he didn't see anything familiar.

He was about to run toward a rock, but he felt like he was being watched again. He turned around, remembering he got the same feeling when Hawkgrowl was watching him.

"Hawkgrowl?" Heronkit yelled out, but nobody responded him. "Hawkgrowl? It's me! Her-"

"You!"

Heronkit gasped as he was suddenly pinned to the ground. He opened his eyes and saw a black-and-cream she-cat on top of him, with a white belly and muzzle. *M-Mother?*

"How dare you show your face again?!" Nectar growled and unsheathed her claws, digging them deep into Heronkit's shoulders.

He let out a wail. "Let me go, please!"

But Nectar didn't move. Instead, she dug her claws even deeper into his shoulders, baring her teeth. "First you kill Meadow, and then you run away and join a Clan?! I bet you told them how bad me and Rattlesnake are, when you are the one who-"

"But I didn't kill her!" Heronkit shrieked, trying to ignore the pain.

"We were playing hide and seek, and she slipped in the gorge! Please, just let me go!"

"Liar!" Nectar screeched and slashed her claws across Heronkit's face. He instantly closed his eyes and let out a pained yowl when Nectar bit his throat. "You're lying! Both me and Rattlesnake saw how you pushed her off the gorge! Now, we've finally avenged her.."

Heronkit squirmed under Nectar's pressure, but then he started choking, blood pouring from his shoulder, forehead, and throat. His vision started darkening, and he looked one last time at his mother before he passed out.

"Heronkit?"

Heronkit opened his eyes, feeling dizzy. He looked around and noticed he was on the same spot where Nectar attacked him. He got up and stretched, then realized that he didn't feel any pain. *What happened?*

"Heronkit, where are you?"

"Here!" Heronkit yowled, but nobody responded. He could hear paw steps approaching him, and purred when he saw Cougarkit. "I'm sorry I left the camp."

But Cougarkit didn't even seem to hear him. She stared at him, horrified. Actually, he was pretty sure she was looking *through* him.

"Heronkit!" Cougarkit let out a loud wail and sprinted toward him. Heronkit tilted his head, then shivered when Cougarkit ran through him.

She.. ran through me?

Heronkit turned around and shrieked at the scene he saw. He saw himself, on the ground, in a pool of blood. His throat was torn open and his eyes were half-closed.

Cougarkit fell to the ground and started shaking him with her front paws. "Wake up!"

But.. but I'm alive! I'm.. right here..

"Heronkit, you're dead."

The tom spun around and saw a starry figure approach him. He squinted his eyes and saw a pure white tom with green eyes sit down in front of him. "I'm sorry."

"W-What do you mean I'm dead?" Heronkit asked, panicked. "I can't be!"

"Your mother killed you." The tom sighed. "I came to take you to StarClan."

"No!" Heronkit yowled and backed off, aware that Cougarkit's wails began to fade away until he couldn't hear her at all. "I don't want to go to StarClan! I want to live!"

"It's too late." The tom rested his tail over his front paws, looking at him. "Come on, you can watch over your friends from StarClan."

"Please!" Heronkit wailed, shaking with disbelief. "I can't be dead! I can't die yet, I'm too young! Please, let me go back!"

The tom hesitated before speaking again. "There is a way for you to go back, but it's a difficult path."

"I would do anything! I just want to go back to WindClan!" Heronkit stepped forward, hope sparking in his chest.

"You would have to start a new life." The tom explained, looking at a red flower. "You will have to be reborn as one of WindClan's new kits, and you could keep all your old memories. However, you're forbidden to tell anyone who you truly are."

Heronkit's hope faded and he looked at the tom with a horrified expression. "W-What do you mean?"

"If you really want to go back to WindClan, you can, but you can't tell anyone that you're Heronkit." The tom sighed. "Either that, or you join StarClan."

"S-So, that means I'll just have to lie to everyone?" Heronkit asked.

"Well, not really. You just have to act like nothing happened, and enjoy your second life." The white tom meowed. "This is your only chance of going back."

"But Cougarkit will be sad.. she'll think I died, when I would be right there." Heronkit wailed. "Why can't I tell her?"

The white tom didn't respond. Instead, he stared him right in the eye. "Whatever you do, don't tell anyone who you truly are, or you'll pay the consequences. This is your secret now, and only yours. Nobody else must know about it."

Heronkit blinked. "What do you mean? What consequences?"

"Do you promise to keep your first life a secret when you are reborn, and never tell anyone who you really are?" The tom asked, avoiding his question.

Heronkit hesitated, then let out a sigh. "I promise."

As soon as he heard Heronkit's answer, the white tom dipped his head and disappeared. Heronkit blinked, confused. *Where did he go?*

Suddenly, he saw another cat approach him. He pawed the ground, anxious, and looked at the newcomer. Then, he let out a surprised shriek.

"M-Meadow?"

His sister purred and padded in front of him. Her tortoiseshell-and-white fur was glowing with a strange light that made it seem like she had stars in her fur. Her eyes were shining like stars. She looked at him with a warm gaze.

"I missed you!" Heronkit wailed and buried his nose in his sister's fur. "I'm so sorry.."

"I missed you too, but it's not time for this yet." Meadow meowed, then backed off.

Heronkit raised his head and looked at her.

"Your time is not over yet, brother." Meadow meowed and touched her nose with Heronkit's. "You will now start a new life. Remember what you were told, and enjoy your second life. I'll be watching over you. I'm so proud of you, Hiron.."

Whitelion padded back and forth near the nursery, panicked. His mate, Nightshine, was having her kits, and so was Cinderstream, Badgerleap's mate.

"I'm so scared! What if something bad happens to her?" Whitelion asked, but he noticed that Badgerleap wasn't really paying attention. Instead, he was looking toward the Tallrock.

Whitelion turned around, then sighed. Last night, Heronkit was found dead outside of camp by Cougarkit, and there was loner scent all over him.

"Loners! Loners did it! I bet it was his crazy parents!" Cougarkit wailed, burying her nose in Heronkit's fur. "Please, Wolfstripe, you have to save him!"

"I'm sorry, Cougarkit, but he's dead." Wolfstripe said with regret in his voice. "He's hunting with StarClan now."

"No! No, he can't! StarClan can't take him yet!" Cougarkit wailed and buried her nose deeper in Heronkit's bloodied fur.

Whitelion looked at the small she-kit with pity. He lowered his head. *Heronkit would have been a fine warrior, his life was taken too soon..*

"Whitelion?"

The white tom blinked and turned around. Both Wolfstripe and Cloudpaw were in front of him.

"Oh, yes? Is Nightshine all right?" Whitelion asked and got up.

Wolfstripe nodded. "Yes! You're a father to one healthy kit."

Whitelion blinked. "One?"

Cloudpaw nodded, and for a second she looked at Heronkit's body, then back at the nursery. She exchanged glances with her mentor, then padded away.

Whitelion blinked, confused, but didn't say anything. He padded in the nursery and purred. Nightshine looked at him.

Whitelion approached his mate and rubbed his cheek with her's, then looked at his kit. He froze.

The kit was black-and-white, with white spots on his back, a white muzzle and belly, a white tail tip, and two white dots above his closed eyes. His tiny ears were completely black, except for the tips, which were white. *He looks.. so much like Heronkit..*

Whitelion raised his head and looked at Nightshine. His mate seemed to notice that, too. She sighed. "Poor Heronkit was taken by StarClan too soon.. I've been thinking about naming our kit Heronkit, to honor him."

Whitelion purred. "Yes, I think that's a good idea. Our little Heronkit.."

Allegiance Update: 2

WindClan

Leader**: Rosestar** - Cream she-cat with green eyes

Deputy: **Hawkgrowl** - Brown tom with black stripes, a white muzzle and a cream belly

Medicine cat: **Wolfstripe** - Dark gray tom with a white muzzle, belly, paws and black stripes

Apprentice, Cloudpaw - Deaf white she-cat with blue eyes

Warriors: **Brownbranch** - Brown tabby tom

Beesun - Yellow-and-white she-cat with black stripes

Badgerleap - Black tom with white stripes on his face

Apprentice, Mushroompaw - Cream tom with brown and black spots and a white belly

Otterbounce - Dark brown tom with green eyes

Apprentice, Vinepaw - Gray tom with cream spots and a white belly

Whitelion - Tall white tom with dark amber eyes

Frostbreeze - Fluffy gray-and-white she-cat with blue eyes

Apprentice, Dovepaw - Gray-and-cream she-cat with green eyes

Sandypelt - Cream tabby tom

Queens: **Skyflower** - Black-and-silver she-cat with blue eyes. Mother to Otterbounce's kit: Cougarkit, a black she-kit with a light brown head, spots and belly, a black ear and a cream ear with green eyes

Nightshine - Black-and-white she-cat with blue eyes. Mother to Whitelion's kit: Heronkit, a black-and-white tom with white spots, blue eyes, and folded ears

Cinderstream - Pale gray tabby she-cat with a white belly. Mother to Badgerleap's kits: Foggykit, a gray-and-white tabby she-kit with blue eyes, Lightningkit, a black tom with a white marking on his face, and Needlekit, a silver tabby she-kit with black ears and paws

Elders: **Volehiss** - Brown tom with a cream belly and white stripes

Poppyflight - Brown-and-white she-cat with a ginger face

ThunderClan

Leader: **Beetlestar** - Brown-and-white tabby tom

Deputy: **Gingerflame** - Dark ginger tom with amber eyes

Medicine cat: **Rainsong** - Gray-and-silver spotted she-cat

Warriors: **Acornfall** - Ginger-and-brown she-cat with a white belly and paws

Tigerfrost - Dark brown tabby tom with white paws and a cream belly

Apprentice, Twigpaw - Pale brown she-cat with green eyes

Cherryleaf - Fluffy ginger-and-white she-cat with green eyes

Apprentice, Smokepaw - Pale gray tom with blue eyes

Thornstrike - Golden-brown tom with black stripes

Lilydream - White she-cat with silver stripes

Apprentice, Goldenpaw - Golden tabby she-cat

Flowershade - Black-and-white speckled she-cat with blue eyes

Queens: **Berrybush** - Brown-and-cream she-cat with green eyes. Mother to Tigerfrost's kits: Maplekit, a pale cream she-kit with brown stripes, and Pinekit, a dark brown tabby tom with a cream belly

ShadowClan

Leader: **Crowstar** - Black tom with a gray belly and paws

Deputy: **Spiderthorn** - Black and reddish-brown tom with amber eyes

Medicine cat: **Silverash** - Silver-and-white she-cat with pale blue eyes

Apprentice, Foxpaw - Ginger-and-white tom with black legs

Warriors: **Hazelberry** - Gray, brown and white she-cat with green eyes

Tinyshadow - Small black tom

Apprentice, Stempaw - Ginger-and-white tabby tom

Mousefang - Gray tom with a black tail and blue eyes

Eaglefall - Ginger-and-brown tom with a white muzzle and belly

Owlcry - Brown she-cat with green eyes

Apprentice, Ivypaw - White she-cat with brown dapples and blue eyes

Oaktail - Pale brown tom with amber eyes

Antscreech - Black tom with dark ginger dapples

Queens: **Sunnyheart** - Tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat. Expecting

Mousefang's kits

Elders: **Spikehiss** - Dark brown tom with spiky fur, black stripes and a white face

RiverClan

Leader: **Shimmerstar** - Silver she-cat with white spots and blue eyes

Deputy: **Splashpelt** - Brown tom with gray stripes and a white belly

Medicine cat: **Jaymoon** - Black-and-gray tabby tom

Warriors: **Bearcloud** - Black tom with a stump for a tail, yellow eyes and a white muzzle

Stonefall - Gray tom

Apprentice, Streampaw - White she-cat with silver paws

Eelstrike - Black she-cat with white stripes and amber eyes

Brackenfall - Dark ginger tom with white paws and a black-striped tail

Echolight - Fluffy dark gray she-cat with a white belly and paws

Apprentice, Leopardpaw - Golden tom with black spots and amber eyes

Birchsong - Dark brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

Blackstream - Black tom with gray stripes and blue eyes

Apprentice, Honeypaw - Golden-and-cream tabby she-cat

Queens: **Amberdawn** - Cream-and-white tabby she-cat with amber eyes. Mother to Brackenfall's kits: Flamekit, a ginger tom with blue eyes, Mosskit, a ginger-and-cream she-kit with a white belly and amber eyes, and Duskkit, a brown-and-cream tom

Cats Outside Clans

Rattlesnake - Brown tom with black stripes and a long, white tail

Nectar - Black-and-cream she-cat

Chapter 7

Heronkit sprinted out of the nursery, flicking his tail. A few moons passed since he died in his first life and given the chance to be reborn. He looked exactly like he used to, except the facts that he had blue eyes, he had white spots on his back and his ears didn't unfold.

He sat down and raised one of his front white paws, licking it, and looked around the camp. When he asked his new mother about his ears, she said that she doesn't know why they didn't unfold, and mentioned that Whitelion's mother's ears were just the same.

Heronkit grunted. *I wish I didn't have to die. I should have became an apprentice along Cougarkit, and..*

"Caught you!"

Heronkit let out a shriek as something pinned him to the ground. Instantly, he hissed and started squirming.

"Calm down, it's just me!" A familiar voice snorted. *Needlekit.*

Needlekit was one of Badgerleap and Cinderstream's kits, along with Foggykit and Lightningkit. They were born on the same day as Heronkit, which was a little weird to him.

The she-kit snorted and backed off. "You always seem so distant and squirm or hiss when I try to play with you. What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing." Heronkit shrugged and got up, shaking his fur. "You're just surprising me."

Needlekit rolled her eyes. "You're so weird."

Heronkit blinked and stared at her, hurt.

"Needlekit!" Cinderstream hissed and hit her daughter's head with

her gray tail. "That's not a way to treat your Clanmates! Apologize to him right now!"

"Fine." Needlekit snorted and looked back at Heronkit. "I'm sorry, I guess."

"It's fine." Heronkit shrugged and padded away, looking at his paws. *I need to stop thinking about my past life. I'm.. someone else now.*

He then heard a wail. He raised his head and looked around the camp, and noticed a black-and-cream she-kit sitting near the elders' den, which was at the far left corner of the camp. Heronkit hesitated. *Oh, Cougarkit..*

Ever since he was reborn, Heronkit tried to avoid Cougarkit as much as he could, but he realized now how much he missed her company. He let out a sigh and padded toward the she-kit. *Just act normal..*

"Hello!" Heronkit forced a purr and sat in front of Cougarkit, flicking his tail happily.

Cougarkit raised her head and turned around, looking at Heronkit. She suddenly let out a wail. "You look so much like him!"

Heronkit felt like his heart was torn in two, but he tilted his head. "Uh.. I'm Heronkit, you?"

"You even have the same name!" Cougarkit cried and turned around, then fell silent.

Heronkit froze. His tail drooped. *She.. she misses me so much.. I'm so sorry..*

"Er, who are you talking about?" Heronkit tried to look as confused as possible.

Cougarkit didn't turn around. Instead, she let out a sigh. "I'm sorry, I was thinking about a friend of mine. He died the night before you were born. His name was Heronkit, just like you, and looked exactly like you, but he had amber eyes, he didn't have spots on his back and his ears weren't folded."

"Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that.." Heronkit whispered. A part of him wanted to yell out that he was actually her dead friend, but he knew he couldn't. *Whatever you do, don't tell anyone who you truly are, or you'll pay the consequences,* the white tom's words echoed in his mind.

Cougarkit suddenly turned around, and Heronkit flinched. She looked so sad, and her ears were bent down out of sadness. "I'm.. I'm Cougarkit."

"N-Nice to meet you, Cougarkit." Heronkit meowed, shocked by how sad his friend looked. "A-Are you all right?"

"My friend died." Cougarkit stared at him. "Do you think I'm all right?"

"W-Well, I could be your new friend." Heronkit meowed, anxious.

Cougarkit hesitated, then nodded. "A-All right, then. I'm sure Heronkit - the old one - would want that."

Of course I want that. Heronkit sighed and got up. "I'm three moons old, so it will be a while until I become an apprentice. You?"

Cougarkit's face lightened a bit. She let out a chuckle. "I'm five moons old, I'm almost one!"

"Lucky!" Heronkit purred, happy that his old friend looked a bit better. "What do you want to do?"

"Hmm," Cougarkit whispered, twitching her ears. "Oh, I know! We could visit the elders! I always wanted to do that with Heronkit before he.." She suddenly stopped and let out a wail.

Heronkit flinched once again. "All right then, let's go to the elders!" He quickly meowed and looked at the den next to them, trying to look as confused as he could. "Er, is this the elders' den?"

Cougarkit nodded. "Yeah, let's go."

She rushed in and Heronkit followed her. He blinked and looked at the cats in front of him. Two cats were talking to each other, one

was a brown tom with a cream belly, white paws and a torn ear, and the other one was a small brown-and-white she-cat.

"Oh, hello!" The she-cat turned around. Heronkit noticed that the elder's face was a weird, pale ginger color. "What brings you two here?"

"Well, we were bored and wanted to visit you." Cougarkit meowed and sat down in front of them.

Heronkit sat down next to her, looking around. He noticed a small hole in the roof, and blinked. "Why is there a hole in the roof?"

"Oh! Volehiss made it." The she-cat meowed. "My brother says he needs fresh air, even though he could just go out of the den." She rolled her eyes and looked at him.

Volehiss rolled his eyes, but didn't respond. Instead, he looked at the two kits. "Would you two like a story?"

Heronkit's eyes sparkled. "Yes, please!"

"Oh, yes!" Cougarkit flicked her tail.

"All right, hmm.. Do you have any ideas, Poppyflight?" Volehiss looked at his sister, and the she-cat nodded.

"I actually do! Do you remember the rogue group that attacked us?"

"Of course I do." Volehiss nodded, his expression darkening. "Are you sure you want to tell the kits that story?"

Heronkit tilted his head. *Rogue group? What rogue group? And why would they want to attack WindClan?*

Poppyflight nodded and looked at the kits. "A long time ago, when both me and my brother were warriors, Rosestar, who was the deputy back then, sent us to patrol the territory."

"Everything was how it was supposed to be, but then we picked a rogue scent." Volehiss continued, lashing his tail as if he was reliving the moment. "It was a fresh one, so me and Poppyflight

decided to go back to camp and report it to Rosestar."

"Rosestar was angry, and she told Blizzardstar, our old leader, about the scent." Poppyflight meowed. "He announced it to the Clan and told everyone to be alert when they leave camp. And then,"

"Guess what the rat-eaters did!" Volehiss suddenly growled.

Heronkit blinked. "Uh, they attacked a patrol?"

Cougarkit rolled her eyes. "They attacked! You mentioned an attack before the story!"

"Indeed they did. And they attacked us in the middle of the night." Volehiss spat. "Those fox-hearts came bursting into our camp and went straight to the nursery!"

"Back then we only had one queen." Poppyflight meowed. "Her name was Frostedwish, the mother of Mushroompaw, Vinepaw, Dovepaw, and Cloudpaw. They were just born, so Frostedwish was too tired to fight."

"The rogues killed her in cold blood." Volehiss growled. "They were about to kill the kits, but then me and other warriors attacked them. Poppyflight nudged Frostedwish's body away from the kits and tried to calm them down."

"It wasn't an easy fight, I could tell." Poppyflight meowed. "The rogues weren't backing down, and when Rosestar and Blizzardstar saw what they did to poor Frostedwish, they were very angry. I can't even describe how angry, but they instantly pinned to the ground a few rogues, and.."

Volehiss suddenly nudged Poppyflight. He stared at her, and Poppyflight nodded. Heronkit tilted his head. *What's going on?*

"They wounded them, badly." Volehiss meowed. "They ordered us to do the same, so we did. The rogues ran off, but took some of our prey with them. Blizzardstar ordered us to chase them out of our territory, and we did. They weren't seen again since that day. Serves them right."

Suddenly, Heronkit noticed that Volehiss looked hurt. The elder fell silent and stared at his paws.

Poppyflight sighed. "Volehiss was Frostedwish's mate. My brother was so shocked that his mate died.. he needed many juniper berries to calm down. He hates rogues." She whispered.

Heronkit shivered, and Cougarkit got up out of a sudden, baring her teeth. "Did he hate Heronkit too?"

Poppyflight shook her head. "No, he did not. Heronkit was just a kit, and also a loner, not a rogue. Volehiss knew he couldn't have came from that rogue group." Then, the elder suddenly looked at Heronkit. "You know, you look a lot like him. You two also share the same name." Poppyflight whispered.

Heronkit shivered and froze. He didn't know what to do or say. "Er.. Cougarkit said that, too." He whispered. "I think my parents named me after him."

"Anyway, we should go now. Thanks for the story!" Cougarkit meowed and padded out of the elders' den. Heronkit sighed, relieved, and rushed after her.

This is going to be way harder than I thought..

Chapter 8

"Heronkit! Wake up!"

Heronkit yawned and opened his eyes. His mother, Nightshine, was looking at him. "Wake up, Cougarkit is becoming an apprentice today!"

"Who is.. what?" Heronkit squinted his eyes and got up, shaking his fur. He looked at his mother, tired.

"Your friend, she's becoming an apprentice." Nightshine meowed and licked her son's head. "I'm sure you want to be there at her ceremony."

Heronkit suddenly flicked his tail, happy. "Oh, yes, I forgot! Where is she?"

"Out of the nursery. Skyflower is with her." Nightshine meowed. "Now come on, go outside! Rosestar might call the Clan any time now."

Heronkit nodded and turned around, running outside. Birds were chirping in the sky, and the black-and-white kit flicked his tail. *I've always wanted to catch a bird.. once I'm an apprentice, I will!*

"Heronkit!" Cougarkit meowed, sprinting toward him. "I'm becoming an apprentice today!"

"I know, Nightshine told me!" Heronkit purred. "I wish I could become an apprentice too!"

But Cougarkit didn't answer. Instead, she looked at the Tallrock and sighed. "I wish Heronkit, the old one, was here, too. We were supposed to become apprentices together."

Heronkit's happiness faded. He let out a quiet wail. *But I am here.*

"Let all cats old enough to run the moors gather beneath the

Tallrock for a Clan meeting!" Rosestar suddenly yowled, flicking her long tail.

"It's time!" Heronkit exclaimed and nudged Cougarkit, then rushed toward Nightshine, who was padding out of the nursery. She purred and sat down next to Whitelion, her mate. Heronkit sat down in front of them, grateful that his new parents were so kind.

When everyone gathered around, Rosestar started speaking. "Today, a kit is ready to become an apprentice. Cougarkit, step forward!"

Cougarkit stepped forward, although Heronkit noticed how sad she was looking. She was dragging her tail, and Heronkit felt more miserable. *I should be there with her.*.

"Today, you have reached your sixth moon, and you are ready to become an apprentice. From this day forward, until you earn your warrior name, you will be known as Cougarpaw." Rosestar meowed, and looked toward the gathered cats. "Your mentor will be Whitelion."

Heronkit looked up and saw his father get up. The tom padded forward and touched his nose with Cougarpaw's.

"Cougarpaw! Cougarpaw!" The cats chanted.

Cougarpaw let out a forced purr and backed off, along with Whitelion.

"Meeting dismissed." Rosestar meowed.

Heronkit got up and rushed toward Cougarpaw. "Congratulations!"

The she-cat looked at him, purring. "Thanks! You'll still have to stay in the nursery for three more moons before you can become an apprentice, though." She meowed teasingly.

"I know." Heronkit grunted, then padded away. Then, Skyflower and Otterbounce approached their daughter to congratulate her. Heronkit looked at his parents. "I wish I could become an apprentice, too."

"Oh, my kit, time will pass faster than you think." Whitelion purred and bent down to lick his son's folded ears. "Before you know it, you'll become an apprentice."

"I hope so. It will be so weird without Cougarki- er, Cougarpaw in the nursery." Heronkit whispered.

Whitelion nodded. "We know, but soon you'll move in the apprentices' den with her. Anyway, I should go take her out of camp now, bye!"

"Bye dad!" Heronkit meowed and watched his father walk toward Cougarpaw. He then grunted. He would never fully accept the fact that Whitelion and Nightshine were his parents. *They're so loving and caring, but it's just so weird.. I'll never feel comfortable around them like I used to feel with Skyflower and my loner parents, or at least before Meadow died.*

Heronkit wailed as he remembered Meadow. His sister visited him when he died, and she was the one who sent him back to life. *I'm glad she's safe and that she watches over me, but I miss her so much..*

"Heronkit? Are you all right?" Nightshine asked.

Heronkit spun around, surprised. "Oh! Yes, I'm all right. Sorry, I was just thinking about, er.."

"About?" Nightshine tilted her head.

Heronkit tried to think of an excuse. "W-Well, I just really want to be an apprentice and train with Cougarpaw. It's going to be weird from now on, or at least until I'll become an apprentice."

Nightshine's expression relaxed, as if she thought Heronkit was thinking about something worrying. "I know, but just like Whitelion told you, time will pass faster than you know." She then bent down and licked Heronkit's head. "You'll be a great warrior one day, my son."

Heronkit purred and flicked his tail happily. "I think I'll go play with Foggykit and Lightningkit now."

Nightshine nodded and padded away.

Heronkit turned around and looked for the two kits. Both of them were much kinder than Needlekit. He was relieved when he saw that the she-kit was stalking a beetle. He quickly approached Foggykit and Lightningkit. "Hello!"

The two kits turned around, abandoning the moss-ball they were playing with. "Oh, hello Heronkit!" Lightningkit meowed, his blue eyes sparkling. "What are you doing?"

"Well, I was wondering if I could play with you two." Heronkit meowed.

Foggykit's tail started flicking. "Oh, of course! We were getting kind of bored anyway." She then looked at the moss-ball with her blue eyes.

Then, Heronkit realized that Foggykit's and Lightningkit's blue eyes were exactly like Badgerleap's, their father, meanwhile Needlekit's pale green eyes were like Cinderstream's, their mother.

"What do you want to play?" Foggykit asked, snapping Heronkit out of his thoughts.

He blinked. "Oh, uh.. how about.." He stopped. He couldn't think of any game.

Lightningkit flicked his ears. "Oh, I have an idea! We could reenact the rogue fight! Heronkit, do you know the rogue group that attacked WindClan many moons ago and killed Frostedwish?"

"I do, actually! The elders told me and Cougarpaw the story a few days ago!" Heronkit meowed.

Lightningkit's tail twitched enthusiastically. "All right! Foggykit, what do you think?"

"That sounds like a good idea!" Foggykit meowed, then smirked. "Lightningkit, you came up with the idea, so you'll be a rogue."

"Aww, not fair!" Lightningkit exclaimed, and Heronkit laughed.

"All right, I'll go pretend to sleep."

"Me too." Foggykit meowed and padded toward a tiny rock not far from them, and curled up. Heronkit padded close to her and lay down, flicking his tail.

After a while, Lightningkit let out a hiss.

Foggykit raised her head and let out a shriek. "Rogues! Rogue attack!"

Heronkit instantly raised his head, acting like he was shocked, and looked at Lightningkit. He let out a snarl and got up, sprinting toward the black kit. He pinned him down and pawed his belly.

Foggykit quickly followed and gently pawed Lightningkit's throat. The tom shrieked. "Oh no! I've been beaten! Let me go!"

"That's what you deserve for attacking us!" Heronkit spat, then let out a purr and backed off. Foggykit did the same, and Lightningkit got up. "This was fun."

"True." Foggykit meowed, then turned around. "Oh, look! Cougarpaw's back!"

Heronkit looked toward the camp exit and saw Whitelion and Cougarpaw walk back in camp. The she-cat dipped her head toward her mentor, then disappeared in the apprentices' den.

"Hello there, kits!"

Heronkit turned around again and saw Mushroompaw approach them. He let out a purr when he remembered the tom, the apprentice who defended him from Beesun and was so kind to him in his first life. *I want to be his friend again. Mushroompaw is a great cat.*

Mushroompaw sat down, flicking his tail. "What were you three playing?"

"We were reenacting the rogue fight!" Foggykit meowed.

Mushroompaw's head drooped. "Ah, that one."

Heronkit froze, realizing how much that hurt Mushroompaw. *His mother was killed in the battle..*

Foggykit seemed to remember that. She looked at the apprentice. "Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't.."

"No, it's all right!" Mushroompaw shook his head, purring. "Lightningkit, were you the rogue?"

The black kit nodded. "Heronkit and Foggykit were so fast! They instantly pinned me to the ground!"

Mushroompaw laughed, then looked at Heronkit for a second.

The kit instantly knew what the apprentice was thinking about. *He noticed how much I look like I used to in my first life.*

But then Mushroompaw looked away. "I think I'll be a warrior before you three, and Needlekit, become apprentices, so we won't train together, but we can still talk after that, obviously!" He meowed.

Foggykit nodded. "Of course! I can't wait until I'll be an apprentice!"

"Me neither! I'll protect WindClan from every possible danger!" Lightningkit meowed and got up.

Heronkit flicked his tail. "Same! I'll catch as much prey as I can! I really want to catch a bird though.."

"Birds are pretty rare in WindClan." Mushroompaw meowed, looking at the tom. "We don't really have trees around here, but sometimes birds still come in our territory to look for food. If you're a bit lucky, then you might catch a bird!"

"Well, I will catch a bird! I'll try my best!" Heronkit puffed out his chest.

"I'm sure you will." Mushroompaw purred, then looked at

Lightningkit and Foggykit. "And I know you two will catch birds too, if you want to."

But Heronkit didn't pay attention to them anymore. Instead, he looked at the sky, because he saw a sparrow fly past the camp.

I promise to catch a bird! I think it will be hard, but once I'll become an apprentice, I'll try my best to find and catch a bird!

Chapter 9

A few moons passed since Cougarpaw became an apprentice. She and Heronkit didn't speak as much anymore, because Cougarpaw had many duties to do, but that was going to change today.

Heronkit flicked his tail and looked at the Tallrock from near the nursery, purring. *I'm going to become an apprentice today! Finally!*

He then looked around, wondering who his mentor would be. *Hawkgrowl is the deputy, but he seems a little scary.. and Beesun-*

Heronkit froze when he saw Beesun. He remembered the hostile yellow-and-white tabby she-cat, the one who didn't hesitate to let Heronkit know that she didn't trust or like him in his first life. He grunted. He knew that she didn't mind him now, but he didn't want to have her as a mentor. She seemed to regret how she treated him in his first life, though, and felt bad about his death, but he still didn't like her.

Hmm, the other options are Brownbranch and Sandypelt.. however, Mushroompaw, Dovepaw, and Vinepaw might become warriors today.

"Are you ready to become an apprentice?" Nightshine asked and padded out of the nursery, sitting near Heronkit.

The tom nodded, purring. "Yes! I can't wait for Rosestar to call the Clan!"

Nightshine purred, then bent down and licked Heronkit's head. "I'm so proud of you. Time passed so fast! It seems like yesterday you were just a tiny kit.."

"Let all cats old enough to run the moors gather beneath the Tallrock for a Clan meeting!" Rosestar's yowl interrupted Nightshine.

Heronkit instantly looked up. "Yes! I can't wait!"

"Calm down, Heronkit." Nightshine chuckled. "Now come on, Whitelion is waiting."

Heronkit looked at his father, who was already sitting in front of the Tallrock. He quickly padded toward him and sat down next to him. Whitelion looked proudly at him, and Nightshine sat down behind him.

"Today, four kits are ready to become apprentices. Needlekit, Lightningkit, Foggykit, and Heronkit, step forward." Rosestar meowed.

Heronkit quickly stepped forward, along with the other kits. He looked at them. Needlekit looked confident and proud, Lightningkit looked happy, and Foggykit looked a bit scared.

"Today, all four of you have reached your sixth moon, and you are ready to become apprentices. Needlekit, from this day forward, until you earn your warrior name, you will be known as Needlepaw. Sandypelt will mentor you."

Needlepaw nodded, although Heronkit noticed that she looked a bit disappointed.

"Lightningkit, until you earn your warrior name, you will be known as Lightningpaw. Brownbranch will mentor you."

Lightningpaw's tail twitched happily.

"Foggykit, until you earn your warrior name, you will be known as Foggypaw. Your mentor will be Hawkgrowl."

Foggypaw looked at the Clan deputy and nodded hesitantly.

"And Heronkit, until you earn your warrior name, you will be known as Heronpaw. Your mentor will be Beesun."

Beesun?

Heronpaw hesitated. *Why Beesun? I don't like her.. why did I have to get* her *as my mentor?*

Heronpaw sighed and got up, turning around. Beesun padded toward him, looking quite happy, and touched her nose with his. "I'm happy to be your mentor, Heronpaw. I'll train you as best as I can!"

The tom snorted. *She was never this kind to me before. She obviously wouldn't have been like this if Nectar wouldn't have killed me.* But Heronpaw didn't say anything. There was nothing he could do now.

"Needlepaw! Lightningpaw! Foggypaw! Heronpaw!" The Clan chanted.

Heronpaw purred and backed off, sitting close to Beesun.

"Now, there is one more ceremony I must make." Rosestar meowed. "Three apprentices are ready to become warriors. Mushroompaw, Vinepaw, and Dovepaw, step forward."

The three siblings stepped forward, looking happy. Heronpaw watched them.

"Do you three promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?" Rosestar asked.

"I do." Mushroompaw meowed.

"I do." Vinepaw nodded.

"I do!" Dovepaw purred, flicking her tail.

"Then, by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior names." Rosestar meowed. "Mushroompaw, from now on, you will be known as Mushroomspot."

Mushroomspot nodded.

"Vinepaw, from now on, you will be known as Vinebreeze."

Vinebreeze flicked his tail, looking happy.

"Dovepaw, from now on, you will be known as Dovestorm."

Dovestorm raised her head, looking confident.

"Mushroomspot! Vinebreeze! Dovestorm!" The Clan chanted.

"Meeting dismissed." Rosestar meowed.

Heronpaw saw Volehiss rush toward his three kits, followed by Cloudpaw. He then turned around and saw Whitelion and Nightshine approach him.

"Congratulations, Heronpaw!" Whitelion purred. "I told you that time was going to pass fast!"

Nightshine nodded. "Yes! Congratulations, Heronpaw! You will be a great warrior one day. Make me proud and listen to your mentor."

Heronpaw tried not to gag while thinking that he had to train with Beesun for six more moons, or even more. "Thank you! And I will."

Whitelion and Nightshine nodded and padded away, and before Heronpaw could do anything, Cougarpaw rushed toward him. "We're finally going to share a den again! I can't wait to train together, but you have a lot to catch up to."

Heronpaw purred. "I know. Anyway, I should go talk with Beesun now." He meowed.

Cougarpaw nodded, looking a bit skeptical. "All right, but be careful around her. I'm not sure I trust her. She used to be so rude to Heronkit.."

Heronpaw froze. *She remembered!* But he nodded. "Oh, er, all right. Thanks."

Cougarpaw nodded and padded toward Whitelion. Heronpaw turned around and rushed toward Beesun, who was waiting for him.

"Are you ready to start training?" The she-cat asked.

Heronpaw nodded. "Yes!"

"All right, but for now I'll give you a tour of the territory, and you

can get moss for your nest." Beesun meowed. "I want you to get a lot of rest tonight, because training begins at dawn."

Heronpaw tried to listen as carefully as he could, but he still couldn't forget how rude Beesun used to be to him. He then shook his head. *No, this is my second life, I have to act as if my first life didn't happen at all.*

But as Beesun started leading Heronpaw out of camp, he couldn't help but wonder longingly. *How can I act like my first life never happened, when most of my happy memories happened back then?*

Allegiance Update: 3

WindClan

Leader**: Rosestar** - Cream she-cat with green eyes

Deputy: **Hawkgrowl** - Brown tom with black stripes, a white muzzle and a cream belly

Apprentice, Foggypaw - Gray-and-white tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Medicine cat: **Wolfstripe** - Dark gray tom with a white muzzle, belly, paws and black stripes

Apprentice, Cloudpaw - Deaf white she-cat with blue eyes

Warriors: **Brownbranch** - Brown tabby tom

Apprentice, Lightningpaw - Black tom with a white marking on his face

Beesun - Yellow-and-white she-cat with black stripes

Apprentice, Heronpaw - Black-and-white tom with white spots, blue eyes, and folded ears

Badgerleap - Black tom with white stripes on his face

Otterbounce - Dark brown tom with green eyes

Whitelion - Tall white tom with dark amber eyes

Apprentice, Cougarpaw - Black she-cat with a light brown head,

spots and belly, a black ear and a cream ear with green eyes

Frostbreeze - Fluffy gray-and-white she-cat with blue eyes

Sandypelt - Cream tabby tom

Apprentice, Needlepaw - Silver tabby she-cat with black ears and paws

Skyflower - Black-and-silver she-cat with blue eyes

Nightshine - Black-and-white she-cat with blue eyes

Cinderstream - Pale gray tabby she-cat with a white belly

Mushroomspot - Cream tom with brown and black spots and a white belly

Vinebreeze - Gray tom with cream spots and a white belly

Dovestorm - Gray-and-cream she-cat with green eyes

Elders: **Volehiss** - Brown tom with a cream belly and white stripes

Poppyflight - Brown-and-white she-cat with a ginger face

ThunderClan

Leader: **Beetlestar** - Brown-and-white tabby tom

Deputy: **Gingerflame** - Dark ginger tom with amber eyes

Medicine cat: **Rainsong** - Gray-and-silver spotted she-cat

Warriors: **Acornfall** - Ginger-and-brown she-cat with a white belly and paws

Tigerfrost - Dark brown tabby tom with white paws and a cream belly

Cherryleaf - Fluffy ginger-and-white she-cat with green eyes

Thornstrike - Golden-brown tom with black stripes

Apprentice, Maplepaw - Pale cream she-cat with brown stripes

Lilydream - White she-cat with silver stripes

Flowershade - Black-and-white speckled she-cat with blue eyes

Apprentice, Pinepaw - Dark brown tabby tom with a cream belly

Berrybrush - Brown-and-cream she-cat with green eyes

Twigheart - Pale brown she-cat with green eyes

Smokegrowl - Pale gray tom with blue eyes

Goldenwing - Golden tabby she-cat

ShadowClan

Leader: **Crowstar** - Black tom with a gray belly and paws

Deputy: **Spiderthorn** - Black and reddish-brown tom with amber eyes

Medicine cat: **Silverash** - Silver-and-white she-cat with pale blue eyes

Apprentice, Foxpaw - Ginger-and-white tom with black legs

Warriors: **Hazelberry** - Gray, brown and white she-cat with green eyes

Tinyshadow - Small black tom

Mousefang - Gray tom with a black tail and blue eyes

Eaglefall - Ginger-and-brown tom with a white muzzle and belly

Owlcry - Brown she-cat with green eyes

Oaktail - Pale brown tom with amber eyes

Antscreech - Black tom with dark ginger dapples

Stemfang - Ginger-and-white tabby tom

Ivycloud - White she-cat with brown dapples and blue eyes

Queens: **Sunnyheart** - Tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat. Mother to Mousefang's kits: Turtlekit, a tortoiseshell she-kit, Rootkit, a gray tom with black stripes, and Flickerkit, a black-and-ginger tom with white paws and gray spots on his face

Elders: **Spikehiss** - Dark brown tom with spiky fur, black stripes and a white face

RiverClan

Leader: **Shimmerstar** - Silver she-cat with white spots and blue eyes

Deputy: **Splashpelt** - Brown tom with gray stripes and a white belly

Medicine cat: **Jaymoon** - Black-and-gray tabby tom

Apprentice, Mosspaw - Ginger-and-cream she-cat with a white belly and amber eyes

Warriors: **Stonefall** - Gray tom

Apprentice, Streampaw - White she-cat with silver paws

Eelstrike - Black she-cat with white stripes and amber eyes

Apprentice, Flamepaw - Ginger tom with blue eyes

Brackenfall - Dark ginger tom with white paws and a black-striped tail

Echolight - Fluffy dark gray she-cat with a white belly and paws

Apprentice, Leopardpaw - Golden tom with black spots and amber eyes

Birchsong - Dark brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

Apprentice, Duskpaw - Brown-and-cream tom

Blackstream - Black tom with gray stripes and blue eyes

Apprentice, Honeypaw - Golden-and-cream tabby she-cat

Amberdawn - Cream-and-white tabby she-cat with amber eyes

Elders: **Bearcloud** - Black tom with a stump for a tail, yellow eyes and a white muzzle

Cats Outside Clans

Rattlesnake - Brown tom with black stripes and a long, white tail

Nectar - Black-and-cream she-cat

Chapter 10

Heronpaw crouched, his eyes fixed on the rabbit in front of him. A few weeks passed since he was apprenticed, and he already knew how to hunt and fight quite well. He was also happy about the fact that Cougarpaw seemed much better than she did when he first talked to her after his first death.

Heronpaw kept his tail as still as possible, and unsheathed his claws. Quickly, he sprinted towards the rabbit. Its ears twitched and looked up, horrified to see the danger approaching it. The rabbit turned around and tried to run away, but Heronpaw was quicker. He jumped on the prey and quickly killed it with a swift bite at its neck.

"Well done, Heronpaw!" Beesun praised him, approaching the tom. "I think you're ready for your first Gathering."

Heronpaw grabbed the rabbit with his jaws and let out a muffled 'thank you'. After that, he looked at his mentor and tilted his head, asking her if he could go back to camp.

"Oh! Yes, sorry. Let's go back." Beesun meowed, then padded toward the prey she caught. Heronpaw didn't wait. Instead, he sprinted toward the camp. *I wish Beesun could stop being so nice to me. She may not know it, but I'm the cat she used to hate.*

He padded in the camp and shivered, feeling the cold wind against his fur. Green-leaf was coming to an end, and soon leaf-fall would start. He grunted and dropped his rabbit in the fresh-kill pile.

"Heronpaw!"

The tom raised his head and saw Cougarpaw rush toward him. "Oh, hi Cougarpaw! What's going on?"

"Guess what! Cloudpaw got her medicine cat name last night!" Cougarpaw meowed, stopping in front of Heronpaw.

"Cloudwatcher!"

"That's a great name!" Heronpaw meowed and sat down, then took a vole from the pile and started eating it. "But.. I wonder how she'll do when she will be WindClan's only medicine cat."

"What do you mean?" Cougarpaw tilted her head and grabbed a rabbit from the pile.

"Well, she's deaf." Heronpaw lowered his voice and took another bite from the vole. "It will be hard for her to teach her future apprentice the herbs and such."

"I suppose, but she will handle it." Cougarpaw shrugged. "Anyway, will you go to the Gathering tomorrow night?"

"I think so." Heronpaw meowed, suddenly excited. "Beesun said I'm ready!"

"Lucky furball." Cougarpaw snorted. "I'm not going."

Heronpaw let out a laugh. "It's okay, you'll go to the next one!"

"I guess." Cougarpaw meowed. "Anyway, you know.. I've seen your face when you come back from training. Do you not like Beesun?"

Heronpaw suddenly froze. *Mouse-brain! She noticed!* "What? What do you mean? She's fine." Heronpaw murmured. "It's just that.. I get tired from training."

"Hmm." Cougarpaw whispered, but didn't say anything else. She quietly finished her rabbit. "I think I'll go now. Hawkgrowl wanted me on a patrol."

"All right, see you." Heronpaw meowed and finished his vole, licking his muzzle. Cougarpaw got up and rushed toward Hawkgrowl. When Heronpaw looked at the deputy, he shivered.

The tom had no expression. He looked coldly at Cougarpaw and meowed something to her. After that, Cougarpaw nodded and padded toward a group of cats waiting by the entrance of the camp. When Hawkgrowl looked toward Heronpaw, the tom averted his

eyes. He awkwardly got up and left the camp.

He looked around the moor, and saw Cougarpaw's patrol walk toward the border with RiverClan, which was a Twoleg bridge over the river that led to the gorge. Heronpaw went the opposite way, toward the Thunderpath. He passed a tall rock, and purred as he felt the grass brush his fur. When he reached the Thunderpath, he looked at the other side.

He saw the Highstones in the far distance, although they were blurry. He squinted his eyes, knowing that the tunnel to the Moonstone was somewhere there. It was a place where only leaders and medicine cats were allowed. He let out a sigh. *I hope I could visit it one day.*

Suddenly, he caught another scent. He spun around and sniffed the air, panicking as he recognized the scent. *Rogues.*

He shivered, remembering Volehiss and Poppyflight's story of how once, when they were on a patrol, they caught rogue scent, and then WindClan was attacked the next night. However, he quickly relaxed. *It's just one rogue.*

He cautiously followed the scent, but then stopped. *What if it's my mother? Or my father? What am I supposed to do then?*

But then he shook his head and continued walking. *No, they're not my parents anymore. They're just two rogues that live near our territory.*

He followed the scent, soon passing by his camp. He sighed, as the rogue scent was leading toward the forest, not far from where Cougarpaw's patrol was. *Should I tell them?*

Right then, a very pale blue-gray she-cat with yellow eyes jumped in front of him. She let out a growl and unsheathed her claws. Heronpaw shrieked and backed off, scared, memories of the night when Nectar killed him flashing in his mind.

"Please, don't kill me!" Heronpaw let out a shriek and closed his eyes, expecting to feel the rogue's sharp claws on his fur.

However, he only heard a chuckle. Heronpaw opened his eyes and

saw the rogue staring at him amusedly. She was finding his reaction funny.

"So, *this* is a Clan cat that everyone was talking about? So defensive and scary? I'm *soo* scared!" The rogue taunted.

Heronpaw suddenly felt embarrasded, but he unsheathed his claws. "Who are you?"

"There we go." The blue-gray she-cat sat and sheathed her claws. "My name is Clover, and, well..."

The rogue paused, and Heronpaw blinked. Clover was hurt! He looked at the rogue more closer, and he noticed that she was old. As old as Volehiss and Poppyflight, or if not even older, and one of her back legs was bleeding.

Clover tilted her head. "Look, I was just going to hunt a little bit of prey and leave, but then I stumbled across you and tried to scare you off, and that was obviously a success." She said mischievously, but then lowered her head. "I promise to leave and never come back, okay?"

Heronpaw hesitated. He wasn't sure if Clover had a group or something to return to, and he kept looking at the old rogue's leg. "Well.. I could take you to WindClan."

Clover blinked. "What?"

"Well.. we have two medicine cats, and they could heal your wounds.. if you want to, I could take you to them." Heronpaw explained.

The rogue shrugged. "It's not like my group would take me back. I'm too old and useless for them, anyway."

Heronpaw flinched in surprise. "No cat is useless!"

Clover sighed. "That's what my group says. Once a cat is too old or too weak to hunt for themself, they get exiled."

Heronpaw let out a snarl. *That's so unfair though!* "Well, come on

then, I'm sure Wolfstripe and Cloudwatcher will heal you."

"Hm." Clover snorted. "Interesting names." But she didn't protest. She got up and limped after Heronpaw, who was leading her toward WindClan's camp. When they entered, the cats turned toward them and looked both confused and angry.

"Who is that?"

"Why is there a rogue in our camp?"

"Heronpaw!"

Heronpaw raised his head and saw Rosestar rush toward him. The cream she-cat looked angry. She looked at the rogue, and then at the apprentice. "Heronpaw, why did you bring a rogue in our camp?"

"Well.. she's hurt and hungry, and I thought Wolfstripe and Cloudwatcher could help her." Heronpaw meowed.

Rosestar tilted her head, clearly distrustful, and looked at the rogue.

Clover limped forward, looking a bit intimidated. "My name is Clover. I'm no spy or anything, if that's what you think. My group exiled me, as I'm too old and too hurt to look after myself. I was just looking for a place to spend the night."

"Hm." Rosestar murmured, and looked at Heronpaw for a bit. She then looked back at Clover and nodded. "All right, follow me, although I want to interrogate you a bit afterwards.."

Clover didn't protest. Instead, she looked at Heronpaw. "Thanks, I guess." She meowed, and limped after Rosestar.

Heronpaw looked after them until they disappeared in the medicine cats' den. After that, the black-and-white apprentice turned and padded out of camp, determined to hunt more for his Clan and for the old rogue.

I hope Clover will be okay.. Rosestar surely wouldn't do anything bad to

her, right?

Chapter 11

As the moon was floating carelessly on the dark blue sky, Heronpaw was following his Clanmates towards the Fourtrees. A cold breeze was rustling his fur, and he shivered. Leaf-fall was here, and that meant the wind was going to be chillier and prey was going to be scarcer.

Heronpaw silently looked to his right as he saw the Twoleg bridge, which was the border with RiverClan. There were no sign of the rival Clan yet, but he could see the river that led to the gorge when he squinted his eyes. He then stopped and froze as he caught the smell of cats. *A lot* of cats.

"Don't worry, Heronpaw." Frostbreeze, one of his Clanmates, purred and approached him. "We're getting close to the Fourtrees, and soon you'll see cats from all the Clans. But, when there's a Gathering, there's a truce that lasts the whole night, and there are usually no fights." Then, she raised her tail, calling the other apprentices to her.

"What is it?" Needlepaw snorted, approaching her with her siblings.

Cougarpaw approached them as well and walked alongside Heronpaw, looking at Frostbreeze.

"Even if there's a truce, always remember: be careful what you tell the other cats." Frostbreeze warned, flicking her fluffy gray-and-white tail. "Some cats might try and get informations about our Clan from you, so they can use it against us. You can talk with anyone, but please, be careful."

"*Pfft!* As if anyone would get anything from me!" Needlepaw said, flexing her claws. "I'd like to see them try!"

"Can you *stop?*" Cougarpaw suddenly growled, fixing her eyes on the younger apprentice. "We don't need to hear you boast for the whole night!"

Needlepaw stopped, rage blazing in her eyes. "Well, it's true. But I *bet* you revealed all of WindClan's secrets on your first Gathering!"

Cougarpaw lashed her tail, unsheathing her claws. "I would never! But I bet *you* would!"

Needlepaw snarled and crouched, looking like she was about to jump on the other apprentice. Heronpaw's eyes grew wide with fear, but before he could move, Frostbreeze quickly stepped between them. "Needlepaw! That's just unnecessary!" She snarled.

"She started it!" Needlepaw growled.

"Oh, please!" Cougarpaw bared her teeth.

"Stop it!"

Heronpaw froze as he heard a deep voice. Hawkgrowl, the Clan deputy, approached them and looked at both of the apprentices with cold, harsh eyes. "Needlepaw, Cougarpaw, I'm disappointed in both of you. You're representing WindClan's future, and I expected you to be more mature than this."

"But-" Needlepaw began to protest.

Hawkgrowl shot the silver tabby she-cat another harsh glare. "Do you have anything to say, Needlepaw? If you do, I can just send you back home."

The apprentice growled, lashing her tail and lowering her head. "No, Hawkgrowl."

"Good. Now, if I see you two about to jump at each other's throats again, I'll make sure Rosestar knows about this." Hawkgrowl bared his teeth as a warning, then turned and padded after the rest of the Clan.

Needlepaw lashed her tail and followed. Cougarpaw rolled her eyes at the other apprentice, but followed quietly. Heronpaw just stood there, frozen. He didn't know what to think. *Did.. Needlepaw really almost attack Cougarpaw?*

"Come on, Heronpaw!" Foggypaw meowed, although she also looked shocked. "We're almost there!"

"Just be careful." Frostbreeze sighed and rushed after her Clanmates. Heronpaw quickly followed.

"Needlepaw is acting quite weird, don't you think?" Heronpaw heard Lightningpaw whisper to Foggypaw. "She always acts like she's in the right, and like everyone else is in the wrong."

"Yeah, but she's our sister, after all, and we can't do anything about it." Foggypaw whispered back.

Lightningpaw whispered something back that Heronpaw didn't hear, because he heard louder voices in front of him.

He rushed forward and passed most of his Clanmates, stopping on a hill. There was a small clearing ahead of him, and the ground was full of sand. There was a large rock in the middle of it, and there was a tree in all four corners of the hollow. Three cats stood on the large rock, and there were a bunch of cats spread around in the clearing, chattering and gossiping.

Heronpaw felt dizzy from all the new scents. If he thought WindClan was weird when he first joined, then the Gathering was even more so.

Cougarpaw chuckled and approached him, all of her irritation from before suddenly gone. "I was like this at my first Gathering as well. You'll get used to it, though. Now come on! Get to know some apprentices before the Gathering starts!" And she sprinted down.

Heronpaw followed and quickly stepped on the sand. He let out a purr. It was really soft and felt a bit fuzzy. He then hesitated to walk forward.

Needlepaw walked past him, nudging him and looking around.

Heronpaw stumbled backwards. "Hey!" He hissed.

Needlepaw looked past her shoulder and rolled her eyes. "Watch where you're going, weird-eared apprentice."

Heronpaw's tail suddenly drooped. He stared at the other apprentice in disbelief, feeling hurt.

"Needlepaw!" Sandypelt growled, stepping next to Heronpaw. "Don't be so rude!"

"Whatever." The she-cat shrugged and walked off.

Sandypelt sighed and looked at Heronpaw. "Ignore her. She's always been like this, but she's going to change when she grows older. Trust me."

Heronpaw watched the cream tabby tom walk away, but he didn't move. Were his ears weird? *I didn't really mind them before, but..*

"Don't mind her." Lightningpaw sighed and approached Heronpaw, lashing his tail. "Needlepaw always finds something to tease someone about. Honestly, your ears are pretty cool! You can even hear well and all, even if they're folded!"

"Really?" Heronpaw raised his head and looked at the black tom.

The apprentice nodded, purring happily.

"Yeah! They're great!" Foggypaw approached them, flicking her tail reassuringly. "Needlepaw is just a rude mouse-brain."

"Thanks." Heronpaw dipped his head to his friends, then rushed toward the crowd of cats, but tried to keep his distance from the other cats. He looked around and tilted his head, wondering about who to talk to first.

"Oh, hello! Is this your first Gathering?"

Heronpaw turned around and saw a golden tom with black spots stare at him with curious amber eyes. The tom looked like he was almost a warrior, but not quite one. *I think he's an apprentice from RiverClan*, he thought, as he recognised the scent.

Heronpaw nodded. "Yes, actually. My name is Heronpaw, what's yours?"

"Leopardpaw." The tom meowed and sat down. "I'm from RiverClan, and you must be from WindClan, right?"

"Correct!" Heronpaw meowed, and then saw Leopardpaw look at him, more curious than before.

"I.. I don't want to be rude, but what's wrong with your ears?"

Heronpaw fell quiet, hurt once more.

Leopardpaw quickly added. "No, no, I think they're great! It's just that.. I've never seen anything like that before."

Heronpaw sighed, relieved. "My ears didn't unfold in my kithood, only a bit, but I can still hear as well as any other cat, or at least that's what I think." He meowed, then lowered his voice. "Needlepaw, another apprentice, thinks they're weird.."

"Well, that's a load of mouse droppings!" Leopardpaw spat. "Just because your ears are folded doesn't mean they're weird! That makes you unique!"

"Oh? Well, thanks!" Heronpaw purring, flicking his tail, and tried to change the subject. "You're almost a warrior, right?"

"Yeah." Leopardpaw meowed. "I'm much older than you, so you have to respect me!"

Heronpaw let out an amused purr, knowing that the RiverClan tom was joking. But then he saw his happiness turn into confusion. "You look.. oddly similar to someone that I knew."

Heronpaw suddenly tilted his head, confused. "Who was he?"

"Well, his name was Hiron, and my parents were good friends with his parents." Leopardpaw whispered. "My parents were going to take me to meet him, but.." He suddenly paused.

Heronpaw froze in shock, and stared at the RiverClan apprentice. *He knew me? My parents were friends with RiverClan cats? He wanted to.. meet me?*

Leopardpaw then shook his head. "I'm sorry, I don't think you care."

"Oh, I actually do!" Heronpaw meowed. "Continue, if you want to."

"All right, then." Leopardpaw sighed, looking a bit hesitant. "My parents were good friends with Hiron's parents. He was an, uh, loner, and he had a sister named Meadow."

Heronpaw's heart ached in pain as he heard his sister's name, but tried to look as unaware as he could.

"My parents told me that one day I was going to meet Hiron, but.." Leopardpaw took a deep breath. "His parents stopped visiting us. And we couldn't find them, either. I'm worried about him.. I don't know anything about him anymore. He was younger than me by a few moons, but he would be older than you right now."

"Oh, I'm sure Hiron is fine." Heronpaw forced a purr, although he knew that was a lie. *Well, it's not really a lie.. I'm fine, I'm right here, it's just that.. I'm not actually Hiron.*

Leopardpaw hesitated. "I guess, but I wish I could meet him.."

"Let the Gathering begin!"

Heronpaw turned and saw Rosestar get up. Heronpaw looked at Leopardpaw and lowered his voice into a whisper. "We can talk after, maybe?"

The RiverClan tom nodded and turned his attention to the leaders.

"I'll go first." Rosestar meowed and stepped forward. "Prey has been running well in WindClan. And we also have four new apprentices. Heronpaw, Lightningpaw, Foggypaw, and Needlepaw."

Heronpaw purred as he heard his name, but stayed quiet, unlike Needlepaw, who was looking around like she was expecting everyone to congratulate her. He rolled his eyes.

"We also have three new warriors. Mushroomspot, Dovestorm, and Vinebreeze." Rosestar continued, switching her attention from the

four apprentices to the three warriors. "And our medicine cat apprentice, Cloudpaw, has earned her medicine cat name, Cloudwatcher. That is all." She meowed, and then sat back down.

A tall, black tom with a gray belly and paws and with a scar on his side got up. Heronpaw blinked, feeling intimidated by the leader.

"That's Crowstar, ShadowClan's leader." Leopardpaw explained quietly. "And his deputy is Spiderthorn."

The RiverClan apprentice pointed with his muzzle to the Great Rock. Heronpaw followed his gaze and saw a black and reddish-brown tom sitting next to three other cats, looking up at his leader. His eyes were a piercing amber color, and Heronpaw flinched with surprise. *Are all ShadowClan cats this intimidating?*

But when Crowstar spoke, he didn't sound aggresive, like Heronpaw expected. He sounded pretty calm. "Prey has been running well in ShadowClan as well. We also have new warriors, Stemfang and Ivycloud."

He rested his icy-blue eyes on the new warriors with respect, and then he looked back at the crowd of cats. Heronpaw relaxed. *He doesn't seem as aggresive as I thought.*

"We also have new kits. Turtlekit, Rootkit, and Flickerkit have been born to Sunnyheart." Crowstar meowed, flicking his tail. "And our medicine cat apprentice has also received his full name, Foxfeather."

Heronpaw looked toward the ginger-and-white medicine cat with black legs. He looked pretty similar to a fox, and he looked proud. Then, Heronpaw blinked as he saw an old, gray-and-silver spotted she-cat near them.

"That's Rainsong, ThunderClan's medicine cat." Leopardpaw whispered. "She's the oldest of the medicine cats, and she has no apprentice yet."

Heronpaw blinked in surprise. *She looks pretty old.. surely she should already have an apprentice by now?*

Crowstar sat back down, and a fluffy silver she-cat with white spots - Shimmerstar, RiverClan's leader, as Leopardpaw said - got up. Her gaze looked around warmly, as if she was analyzing her words before speaking.

"The river has been full with fish, and we are very thankful to StarClan for that." Shimmerstar meowed. "We have new apprentices as well, Flamepaw, Duskpaw, and Mosspaw. Jaymoon has agreed to train Mosspaw as the next medicine cat."

Shimmerstar rested her gaze on the new apprentices, and then looked up. "Our oldest warrior, Bearcloud, has retired to the elders' den. That is all."

Shimmerstar sat down, and the last leader - a brown-and-white tabby tom got up. Heronpaw guessed that he was ThunderClan's leader.

"That's Beetlestar." Leopardpaw whispered.

"We have two new apprentices, Pinepaw and Maplepaw." Beetlestar meowed. "Prey has been running well in ThunderClan." He then sat down.

Heronpaw blinked. *That's it? He looks like he's in a rush.*

The other leaders looked confused as well, but they didn't say anything. "Then, the Gathering is over!" Rosestar said, and jumped down. Heronpaw got up and turned toward Leopardpaw.

"Thanks for telling me who the leaders are." Heronpaw meowed. "And, uh, Spiderthorn and Rainsong as well."

"No problem, but I have to go now." Leopardpaw meowed, flicking his tail. "See you at the next Gathering, then. Hopefully I'll be a full warrior by then!"

Heronpaw purred in amusement, and the RiverClan apprentice sprinted toward his Clanmates. The black-and-white tom turned and padded toward Rosestar, who was already gathering the other cats, but he was too tired to focus on what everyone else was saying.

This Gathering was amazing, but I'm so tired.. I can't wait to get home and sleep!

Chapter 12

Heronpaw watched the enemy in front of him, crouched behind a tall rock. He squinted his eyes and kept as still as possible, baring his teeth. It was the day after the Gathering, and although he was pretty tired, he was determined to finish what he started.

He slowly creeped forward, hissed, and sprinted forward. His opponent turned around to face him, but it was too late. Heronpaw pinned the cat to the ground, holding the cat down with his front paws on their shoulder.

"Well done, Heronpaw!" Beesun meowed. "You're improving a lot in fighting, and you've been an apprentice for almost a moon! Keep this going, and you'll become a warrior in no time."

Heronpaw dipped his head and took a step backwards, letting Beesun get up. She shook her fur and looked at her apprentice. "All right, let's go back to camp now. I think Rosestar wants to call a Clan meeting about Clover."

Heronpaw nodded and followed his mentor back to camp. Clover has been in the camp for two days, and her fur was covered in cobwebs. However, she looked healthier, and she was well-rested and well fed now. He was wondering about what the leader was going to say about her.

"Let all cats old enough to run the moors gather beneath the Tallrock for a Clan meeting!" Rosestar called out as soon as Beesun and Heronpaw entered the camp. He sprinted forward and sat next to Whitelion, who gave a quick nod to his son.

"Clover has been in our camp long enough, and I think it's safe to say that she can leave." Rosestar meowed and looked at the old she-cat, who padded forward. "However, it's her choice. She can choose to stay, if she wants to."

Surprised murmurs came from the other cats. Heronpaw tilted his

head. *Stay? Does Rosestar want Clover to join WindClan?*

Clover didn't instantly answer. Instead, she looked a bit hesitant. "I am very grateful for the help you and your Clan gave me, Rosestar, but I think I've been here for too long." She murmured humbly. "I should leave."

"There's no need." Rosestar meowed. "Your group left you to die, and I'm sure they aren't good cats. You can stay if you want. Your wisdom would greatly help our cats."

Clover hesitated, but Heronpaw saw her nod. He looked at the old rogue, confused. *What kind of group is that, anyway? Leaving your elders to die if they're hurt?*

"Well.. they really aren't great cats, but I wasn't really allowed to leave." Clover meowed, then hesitated and looked around. "I would like to join WindClan, if that's okay. This is the only real group I've seen in my entire life. Here, cats help each other, whereas in my group everyone had to hunt for themselves. I could help around as a warrior." Clover dipped her head in respect, but Heronpaw knew she was being hesitant. *She wants to join WindClan, but she's too old to do warrior duties.*

Rosestar shook her head. "You can join WindClan and become one of our elders, if you want. You will be welcome, and you can tell kits and apprentices stories about your rogue life. Even warriors, if they want to. But it's your choice, and yours alone."

Clover looked more relaxed. She dipped her head. "Thank you, Rosestar. It's a good offer, and I accept. You're a good leader, much better than my old one."

The cream she-cat nodded, her green eyes warm. "Then, we welcome you as one of WindClan's elders. And your new name will be.."

"Wait." Clover took a step forward, looking a bit hesitant. "May I keep my name? I'm too old for a new name, anyway. It's the name my mother gave me, and I don't want to forget that." She meowed.

Heronpaw looked surprised, and she noticed that many of his Clanmates did too, but he respected Clover's wish and he admired her bravery.

"If that's what you wish, then so be it." Rosestar dipped her head, and then looked at the other cats. "I hope each one of you will treat her as one of our cats now, and bring her as much prey and new moss as you bring the other elders. Meeting dismissed."

Heronpaw got up, and then saw that Hawkgrowl didn't seem as welcoming as Rosestar. He looked at Clover coldly, as if he was expecting her to do something foolish. *But what?* Heronpaw was confused, but brushed it off quickly. *I think he's just worrying about his Clan. He is our deputy, after all.*

Before he could leave, Whitelion approached him quickly. "By the way, Heronpaw, have you seen Cougarpaw anywhere? She wasn't in camp all morning, and she hasn't returned yet."

Suddenly, Heronpaw froze. *Cougarpaw is missing?*

"No, I didn't." Heronpaw murmured, his eyes wide. "I haven't seen her at all today, actually."

Whitelion suddenly looked panicked. He lashed his tail and looked around. "I'll ask Hawkgrowl to-"

"My kit is missing?"

A wail echoed through the camp. Heronpaw looked around and saw Skyflower, Cougarpaw's mother, run towards them. Her mate, Otterbounce, followed her quickly.

"What do you mean, Cougarpaw is missing?" Skyflower looked at Whitelion desperately. "Tell me you're joking!"

"I'm not. Cougarpaw hasn't been in camp all morning." Whitelion murmured. "I thought she went out to patrol, or.."

"We have to find her!" Otterbounce declared, and looked around for Hawkgrowl, who was getting up.

Now panicked, Heronpaw stepped forward. "There's no need for a patrol! She's for sure around the territory somewhere, so I can look for her. If I won't find her, I'll come back and tell Hawkgrowl."

"There's no time! My kit needs to be found *now*!" Skyflower protested.

Whitelion looked at her reassuringly. "I know, Skyflower, but Heronpaw is right. There's no need to alert the whole Clan. A single cat is enough to look for her, at least for now."

Heronpaw didn't wait for Skyflower's or Otterbounce's response. Instead, he got up and sprinted out of camp, looking behind his shoulder one last time. "I promise to come back with Cougarpaw!"

He then left camp and looked around, squinting his eyes. He tried to be calm, but deep down he wanted to panic and wail like a kit. *What if she died? What if.. What if she fell in the gorge, just like Meadow?*

Heronpaw quickly shook his head, brushing the idea off. *No, she's fine, she's here somewhere I just have to find her.*

The tom took a deep breath and instantly caught Cougarpaw's scent. Relaxing, he followed it through WindClan's territory. It went the opposite way of the forest, which calmed Heronpaw down, and it was going toward the barn. He started to panic once more, but then he saw his friend sitting on a rock not far from the barn, looking at the ground. He quickly thanked StarClan and rushed toward her.

"Cougarpaw!" Heronpaw meowed and jumped on the rock next to her.

The apprentice flinched in surprise and looked at Heronpaw, but then sighed. "Oh, it's just you."

"What are you doing? The whole Clan is looking for you! Come back to camp!" Heronpaw meowed, both angry and relieved at the same time. *I was so scared! I thought she died..*

"I'm fine here." Cougarpaw sighed and looked at the ground again.

Heronpaw's anger began to fade, and it was replaced by confusion.

He sat next to her and looked at the ground. "What's there?"

"Heronkit is buried there." Cougarpaw whispered, her eyes clouded with grief. "You remember him, don't you? My old friend, the one who shares your name.. he was buried there."

Heronpaw flinched in surprise, not expecting that answer. He looked at the ground in front of the rock, noticing that a rose was laying on top of it. The wind was blowing softly, making the petals quiver slowly.

Sadness filled his heart. *My old body was buried there, meanwhile I'm here, alive, looking at the place where I was buried.. Oh StarClan, why?*

Suddenly, Cougarpaw let out a loud wail. "I miss him so much! I don't understand why he had to die! I don't understand.. maybe if I was faster and found him quicker, I could've prevented his death.."

Heronpaw looked at her, saddened. *I'm right here..*

Suddenly, anger clawed at his heart as he remembered the white StarClan cat's words. *"Whatever you do, don't tell anyone who you truly are, or you'll pay the consequences."* What kind of selfish rule was that? Was the StarClan tom just expecting him to act like nothing happened at all, while Cougarpaw was still grieving for him?

That's it! I don't care what the consequences are, but I can't bare to see Cougarpaw sad anymore! She must know the truth. I have no idea what the consequences are, but I'll face them, just as long as Cougarpaw won't be sad anymore.

Heronpaw got up and took a deep breath, trying to calm down. "Cougarpaw, Heronkit's not dead."

"What?" Cougarpaw looked at him, confused.

"He's right here, in front of you." Heronpaw meowed.

Cougarpaw looked confused for a heartbeat, but then sighed,

looking slightly amused. "You're not Heronkit just because you share the same name."

"No, listen!" Heronpaw took a step forward. "It's me, I'm Heronkit! When I died, a StarClan cat visited me and gave me another chance to live! A second life! I was reborn! I'm Heronkit!"

Cougarpaw's sad expression suddenly turned to a shocked one. "You..You're really Heronkit? No, wait, you're bluffing. You have to be."

"No, I'm telling the truth!" Heronpaw's voice was becoming desperate. "I had a sister, Meadow, and my parents were Rattlesnake and Nectar! When I was a kit, I left the camp to feel the grass under my paws again, and Nectar came out of nowhere and killed me because she wanted revenge for Meadow!"

Then, Heronpaw purred. "You don't have to be sad anymore. It's all right, I'm here."

Cougarpaw didn't respond. She stared at Heronpaw, looking like she was still processing his words. Suddenly, she bared her teeth and unsheathed her claws, looking angry. Heronpaw's tail drooped and his happiness faded.

"So you lied?" Cougarpaw growled and got up. "You were here all along, and yet you didn't tell me! Did you know how sad I was?! How much I was grieving?!"

Heronpaw looked at her, shocked and scared of her reaction. "But.. I-"

"I don't want to hear it!" Cougarpaw snarled, drawing her lips back in the beginning of a snarl. Her green eyes were blazing with outrage and resentment. "You hurt me! You knew how sad I was, but you still didn't tell me! If you told me from the start, I wouldn't have been so heartbroken! I wouldn't have grieved at all!"

"But.. I couldn't.. the-" Heronpaw tried to explain.

"No!" Cougarpaw lashed her tail, interrupting him. "You could have, you just didn't want to!" Then, she stared at him, looking

hurt. "I guess you didn't care about me. You liked to see me sad, didn't you?"

"W-What? I didn't!" Heronpaw looked at his friend, desperate. "Cougarpaw, I promise! I couldn't-"

"Leave me alone, and don't bother me again!" Cougarpaw snarled and, with a mixture of anger and sadness, rushed toward the camp. Heronpaw sat there in disbelief and looked after her.

Suddenly, he realized what Cougarpaw just told him. She was angry at him for lying to her, for keeping the secret that he was Heronkit, and now their friendship was over. Heronpaw wailed, feeling like the world was collapsing around him. His legs grew weak and he slipped on the ground, trembling from sadness.

I wanted to tell Cougarpaw the truth, to tell her that everything is fine.. but was that really the best choice? Now our friendship is over, and it's all my fault.

Chapter 13

Heronpaw looked around, confused. *Where am I?*

He was in a warm, lush forest. The sun was shining brightly on the clear blue sky above him. Although the atmosphere was warm and welcoming, he didn't want to be there. He had no idea what was going on, or where he was. He dropped into a crouch, feeling scared

"You broke your promise."

Heronpaw spun around and saw the white StarClan tom walk out of some bushes, his fur brushing against them. "You told Cougarpaw the truth, and you broke your promise. It's time for your punishment."

Heronpaw looked up at him, cowering with fear. His eyes were wide with fear.

"Because you didn't keep your secret about your first life, you'll lose your second one as well." The tom meowed indifferently. "Welcome to StarClan, Heronpaw."

The tom looked at the StarClan cat, shocked. "Wait, no! I can't die! Please, let me go back!"

The white tom looked away. "You told Cougarpaw about your first life, and you broke the promise. That was the only rule you had to follow. And everyone who breaks a promise must be punished. I can't chase you out of StarClan, that's just cruel. You have to leave your second life behind and join us for good."

Heronpaw felt sick as the StarClan tom turned around and started to walk away. He let out a wail, getting up slowly. "You don't understand! I have to go back, please!"

The tom didn't respond, instead flicking his ear to show that he

heard him, but didn't care about what he had to say.

Heronpaw looked at his white paws, sighing. *This is it, then?*

Suddenly, he shook his head, angry. *No! I can't give up! Cougarpaw might not want anything to do with me anymore, but she still needs me! She just has to get over her anger!*

Heronpaw raised his head, trying to look as confident as he could. He called out indignantly. "Listen! If you saw your friend grieving because their friend died, but you're their reborn friend, what would you do? Just sit there and watch your friend grieve and be sad until the end of their life? Tell me!"

Heronpaw's words caught the StarClan's tom attention. He stopped and turned his attention to the apprentice, although he didn't give away any emotion, so Heronpaw just continued.

"I care about Cougarpaw, and I didn't want her to suffer for nothing! I just had to tell her!" Heronpaw hissed. Although he seemed angry, he was actually scared, terrified even, but he didn't want to die yet. He knew what he was doing was risky, but he had to do it. "Answer me! Would you continue lying to your friend and watch them suffer?"

The StarClan cat's eyes narrowed with sympathy. "Honestly? No, but that was the rule."

"Who made the rules?" Heronpaw hissed. "This is mouse-brained! Did they even *have* friends?"

The white tom let out a sigh. "Wait here, I'll be back." He then turned and disappeared in some bushes from behind him. The bushes rustled for a few heartbeats, then fell silent.

Heronpaw sat down, and as time began to pass, he started getting anxious. *What if he just left me? What if.. I'm stuck in StarClan forever, and I'm really dead?*

But while he was worrying, the StarClan cat came back. A long-furred silver-and-white she-cat was following him. She twitched her tail and sat down in front of Heronpaw, then whispered something

to the white tom. When he left, she turned her starry blue eyes to the apprentice. He started pawing the ground, feeling self-aware.

"My name is Featherwish. I was once RiverClan's deputy, many moons before you or your parents were born." The she-cat meowed. Heronpaw felt intimidated.

"No need to be scared." Featherwish dipped her head, her gaze warm. "I'm the one who made my friend tell you about having a second life, you know? Now, tell me what's bothering you."

Heronpaw looked up, trying to be confident, although he just wanted to run away and hide somewhere. He took a deep breath. "I'm sorry I told Cougarpaw the truth, but.. she was still grieving my death and she was really heartbroken. I didn't want her to suffer anymore, and I thought it was a good idea to tell her what was really going on. Surely you would've done the same?"

Featherwish didn't instantly answer. Instead, she stared at Heronpaw without speaking. After a few more heartbeats, she nodded. "Yes, that was a brave idea, but you still broke the promise. Why?"

"I told you. I just.. didn't want Cougarpaw to suffer." Heronpaw sighed and looked at his paws. "She was my friend, after all, and she was a good one, too. If she wouldn't have existed, then I probably wouldn't have survived. At all. And seeing her so helpless and heartbroken just.. broke my heart." He confessed, looking up at the she-cat.

Featherwish was listening to him carefully. She then nodded. "I loved a tom once. He was from ShadowClan. We met at a Gathering, and we clicked instantly, so we continued to meet in secret. However, I had to be fully loyal to my Clan, as the deputy. I told the ShadowClan tom the truth, and thought it was a better idea to stay friends, but I.."

The she-cat hesitated. "He got angry and snapped at me, just like Cougarpaw did with you. He was hurt and angry and felt like I betrayed him. After that, I didn't want other cats to go through the same thing as I did. It just hurts. No one should go through that."

Featherwish looked at the apprentice with an understanding gaze. "You know what's not right, either? What I did. It hurts to have your friend be mad at you, but I shouldn't have made you keep your first life as a secret. You should go back, and I'm sorry. I just thought this was for the best, but now.. I see that I was wrong. We all make mistakes after all, don't we?"

Heronpaw's eyes lit up, hopeful. "Yes! Thank you!"

Featherwish nodded, purring. "No need to thank me. However, I must ask you another thing. Now that you told Cougarpaw the truth, I don't want you to tell anyone else, all right? I can understand why you told Cougarpaw that, but you should keep it away from the other cats. They might not have a good reaction, and who knows how they'll act. What do you think?"

Heronpaw hesitated, but then nodded. *It's better like this, anyway. The other cats didn't grieve as much as Cougarpaw did.* "Yes, I promise. But can I still talk to Cougarpaw about my first life? If we'll be friends again, that is.."

The she-cat nodded. "Of course."

Heronpaw suddenly panicked. "But what if she tells anyone else? What will I do?"

Featherwish purred. "She won't tell anyone if you ask her not to, don't worry. Now run along, and I'm sorry. We'll meet again in StarClan when it's time."

Heronpaw purred as Featherwish touched her nose with his. Suddenly, everything turned black.

"Heronpaw?"

He opened his eyes and gasped for air. He coughed and looked around. He saw Beesun sitting in front of him, with Wolfstripe behind her.

"Thank StarClan, we thought we lost you!" Wolfstripe sighed and stepped forward. "Are you all right?"

My body was dead while I was in StarClan. Heronpaw thought, relieved that Featherwish was so understanding. He then nodded. "Yes, I'm all right now."

"What happened?" Beesun asked, tilting her head. "Why did you.. I mean.."

Heronpaw hesitated. He knew he couldn't tell them anything. While he was trying to come up with an excuse, Wolfstripe stepped forward.

"That doesn't matter right now. Maybe your heart stopped in your sleep, but not long enough to kill you. I managed to give you some herbs, and it looks like they worked. What matters is that you're all right now. I'll let you rest, but I'll check on you again later." The medicine cat said, looking relieved, and he turned around, padding out of the apprentices' den.

Heronpaw looked around and noticed that all the other nests were empty. He looked at the den entrance and noticed that rays of sunshine were dancing softly on the ground. The sun must have risen long ago. He blinked, feeling guilty. *I was asleep for a long time.. the other apprentices are going to finish training soon.*

"I don't think we should train today. You can have a day off." Beesun meowed softly. "You deserve a rest, after.. whatever happened. But I want you to be ready for training tomorrow, because I won't go easy on you at all!"

Heronpaw nodded. "All right. Thank you, Beesun."

Her mentor dipped her head. "Go back to sleep and rest. I'll talk to Rosestar and tell her about this, but don't worry, she won't be mad."

Beesun turned and padded out. But before she left, she looked back at him, looking completely relieved. "I'm glad you're all right."

Heronpaw blinked in surprise, but nodded gratefully. He let out a sigh and rested his head on his paws, closing his eyes.

If only you knew I'm Heronkit, I don't think you would be this kind to me anymore.

Chapter 14

A few moons passed since the day Heronpaw revealed his secret to Cougarpaw. He tried talking to his former friend many times after that, but she didn't listen to him and walked away. Heronpaw stopped bothering her after that. Although he wanted his friend to forgive him, he knew he couldn't force her to.

Heronpaw sat on a rock right outside WindClan's camp, looking around with his head lowered. He felt so alone..

"Heronpaw! Are you listening?"

The apprentice raised his head quickly and saw Beesun looking at him with a harsh glare. He lowered his head once again. "Yes, Beesun. I'm sorry."

His mentor rolled her eyes. "I said that I want you to gather moss for the elders. Right now."

"On it." Heronpaw nodded and jumped off the rock, padding away. His mentor started being harsher on him because his assessment was approaching. He grew worried that Cougarpaw told Beesun that he was Heronkit, but he soon relaxed as he remembered Featherwish's words. *She's sure Cougarpaw wouldn't tell anyone, and after all, she's a StarClan cat. And if Cougarpaw really did, then Beesun wouldn't bother talking to me anymore. And, either way, I don't think Cougarpaw has a reason to tell anyone the truth.*

Heronpaw sniffed the air and looked around the meadow, then at the path leading to the Fourtrees. He began walking toward it, thinking that he could gather some moss from the trees near the RiverClan border.

Suddenly, he picked up a scent. A familiar scent. *Too* familiar. Heronpaw's fur bristled as he also picked up RiverClan scent. *What is a rogue and a RiverClan cat doing on our territory?*

He followed the scent as fast as he could, noticing that it led toward the RiverClan border. He slowed down as he approached the Twoleg bridge and hid behind a bush, looking past it.

Two cats were standing right in front of the bridge: a golden tom with black spots and a black-and-cream she-cat with a white chest. *Leopardpaw and Nectar.*

Heronpaw panicked, feeling his heart beating against his chest. What were they doing here? He remembered Leopardpaw telling him that his parents used to be friends with Nectar and Rattlesnake, but the two rogues stopped visiting them. *Then what is Leopardpaw doing with Nectar?*

He noticed that Nectar looked angry. He crouched down and creeped to the closest tree, which stopped right before the path leading to the Fourtrees. From there, he could hear the two cats clearly.

"But I don't understand!" Leopardpaw wailed. "What do you mean?"

"I already told you!" Nectar growled, unsheathing her claws. "Hiron is dead! He isn't coming back!"

Heronpaw froze as he heard Nectar's words. *I'm not dead! You just don't know it!*

Then he saw how angry Nectar was. She didn't sound hurt or regretful. She was just angry. But not at herself, at Leopardpaw.

Heronpaw bared his teeth and lashed his tail. *She doesn't regret that she killed me! She doesn't regret it at all! She really thinks she avenged Meadow!*

Heronpaw hissed as outrage and hate surged through him like fire. He has never been this angry before, but he hated Nectar too much. *She's not my mother anymore. A mother would never kill her own kit.*

Without thinking, Heronpaw let out a loud snarl and sprinted toward the two cats, stepping between them. He looked at Nectar, his eyes blazing with anger. "Am I really dead though, mother?"

Nectar's anger faded. Instead, she looked at Heronpaw with confusion. Then, her jaw dropped, stepping backwards in disbelief. Her eyes widened with shock. "No, it can't be... I killed you!"

Heronpaw heard Leopardpaw gasp in shock, but he didn't care. He bared his teeth at Nectar, arching his back and ready to jump on her and pin her down. Then, a realization hit him: he just revealed his secret to another cat. He broke the promise *twice.* But it wasn't just one cat, it was *two* cats.

Heronpaw started to panic. *This time I'm really going to StarClan and I won't come back!* But then, he had an idea.

The WindClan apprentice nodded, trying to calm down as he bared his teeth again. "You're right. I'm not Hiron, but I heard his story. You killed your son. How could you?"

Nectar relaxed slightly at Heronpaw's words, but it didn't last long. She took a step forward again, her eyes blazing with anger again. "All I did was avenge his sister! He killed her by pushing her in the gorge!"

Heronpaw tried his best not to jump at her, instead trying to come with an excuse. "I've heard the story from one of his friends. I'm sure he didn't do that! It's mouse-brained! Why would *a kit* kill their sibling?"

Nectar didn't respond. Instead, she let out a loud hiss and jumped on Heronpaw, pinning him down and raking her claws across his shoulders.

Heronpaw let out a hiss of pain and froze, remembering the night where Nectar killed him. The memory was flashing through his mind as violent as a raging storm. He tried fighting back, but the memory was too painful and vivid for him to be able to do anything.

Suddenly, Leopardpaw jumped at Nectar, knocking her off of the WindClan apprentice. He bared his teeth as Heronpaw got up. "Stay away, you crazy rogue!"

Nectar got up and hissed, looking at Heronpaw with an expression so hateful that it felt like a sting. But Heronpaw looked back at her and unsheathed his claws, baring his teeth as a warning.

"Fine, I'm leaving." Nectar snapped, then looked at Leopardpaw. "Don't bother me again, and neither will I."

Nectar turned around and sprinted away from them, lashing her white tail tip. She looked past her shoulder one more time angrily, but Heronpaw noticed that she looked a bit scared as well. She then disappeared behind a bush.

Heronpaw sighed, relieved, the images of his first death fading away slowly. He turned toward Leopardpaw. "Thanks."

"No problem." Leopardpaw looked after Nectar, then back at Heronpaw. "I..I didn't know that Hiron died, or that Nectar killed him. She killed her own son.. what kind of mother is she?"

Heronpaw dropped his gaze. "I don't know, but didn't you hear? She thinks he killed his sister."

Leopardpaw let out a sad sigh. "Hiron didn't deserve to die. I'm sure he didn't actually kill his sister. That's really unbelievable."

Heronpaw closed his eyes, wishing he could tell Leopardpaw that he was actually Hiron, but he knew he couldn't. Suddenly, Leopardpaw asked him:

"Wait, you mentioned that Hiron had a friend, and you know them. Who are they?"

Heronpaw opened his eyes and looked at Leopardpaw, who was now confused. He gulped. "Well.. I heard that Nectar chased Hiron away, and he joined WindClan as Heronkit and became friends with Cougarpaw. And I.. well, Cougarpaw said that she found him dead, apparently killed by Nectar. I share his name because I was born the day after he was killed."

Leopardpaw blinked. "I see.. well, I'm glad he had a nice home before he died. I'm sure he's watching over us from StarClan."

He's not, he's looking at you right now. Heronpaw thought, but suddenly remembered what Beesun told him. "Oh, I'm sorry, Leopardpaw, but I really have to go now. See you!"

"Oh, all right. See you! Also, I'm Leopardstorm now!" The RiverClan tom meowed.

Heronpaw blinked, then nodded and let out a purr. "Congratulations!"

"Thank you." Leopardstorm purred, then Heronpaw turned and sprinted off, knowing that he had to get back to camp as soon as possible.

Heronpaw padded back in camp, carrying some moss in his jaws. Beesun suddenly sprinted toward him, looking both angry and worried. "What took you so long?"

"Well.." Heronpaw tried coming up with an excuse, lowering his head. But he didn't know what to say, so he fell silent.

Beesun sighed. "It's fine, forget it. Here, let me take the moss to the elders. Rosestar is holding a meeting, so hurry."

Heronpaw nodded and dropped the moss. Beesun quickly picked it up and turned around, rushing toward the elders' den. The apprentice then padded toward the Tallrock, where the cats started gathering. He quickly sat next to Whitelion and Nightshine, sighing in relief. *They are my real parents, not Nectar and Rattlesnake.*

When everyone was gathered, Rosestar nodded. "Today, an apprentice is ready to become a warrior. Cougarpaw, step forward."

Heronpaw's heart ached in pain as he saw his former friend brush past him without looking at him. She looked pretty confident. *She still hasn't forgiven me, then.*

"Do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?" Rosestar asked.

"I do." Cougarpaw dipped her head.

"Then, by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name." Rosestar meowed. "From this day forward, you will be known as Cougarheart."

"Cougarheart! Cougarheart!" The Clan chanted, and Heronpaw was one of the loudest voices.

"Meeting dismissed." Rosestar meowed and jumped down.

Otterbounce and Skyflower rushed toward Cougarheart to congratulate her, and Heronpaw awkwardly hung back. *Even though she might not want to, I have to congratulate her, too.*

Otterbounce said something that Heronpaw didn't hear, then he and Skyflower padded away. After that, he quickly got up and rushed toward his friend. "Cougarheart."

The she-cat turned around, but hissed when she saw him.

"I just wanted to say, uh.. congratulations. You deserve to be a warrior!" Heronpaw purred.

Cougarheart hissed. "I told you, stay away from me, traitor!" Then she turned around and padded out of the camp.

Heronpaw's shoulders drooped and he looked after her. *I'm no traitor, you just don't understand my reasoning.. or really wanted to hear it.*

"Hey, Heronpaw?"

The apprentice looked past his shoulder and saw Mushroomspot approach him. The warrior sat down next to him and looked after Cougarheart.

"Say, what happened between you and Cougarheart? You two were good friends as kits and as apprentices, but a few moons ago when she disappeared, you went to look for her and just.. stopped talking to each other, and now she snapped at you. What happened?"

Heronpaw pawed the ground anxiously, unsure what to say. "We..We just had an argument, that's all."

"An argument?" Mushroomspot tilted his head. "About what?"

"I'd.. rather not say." Heronpaw whispered, looking at his paws.

Mushroomspot dipped his head, sympathetic. "It's all right, I understand. But you two can't go on like this. An argument can't end a friendship like that. You should talk to her about it, and I'm sure everything will go back to normal, okay?"

"I'll try." Heronpaw meowed.

"All right, but trust me, after you two talk, everything will go back to normal, and she will forgive you. Just believe in yourself." Mushroomspot reassured him, then padded away.

Heronpaw looked after him, hesitant, and then looked back at his paws.

But how can I talk to Cougarheart when she doesn't want to talk with me?

Chapter 15

"Are you ready, Heronpaw?"

"Ready." Heronpaw meowed, confident, and looked at Beesun. Two days passed since Cougarheart became a warrior, and now it was his turn to become one. Although he was younger than Cougarheart, she became a warrior later than she was supposed to, because Whitelion said that she couldn't concentrate during her training and was falling behind. Heronpaw felt guilty, because he knew it was his fault, but he tried to be as focused as possible.

"Now, I want you to catch as much prey as possible." Beesun ordered. "I will be watching you carefully, but even if you see me, do not interact with me. I'll tell you when to stop."

Heronpaw froze. "But it's leaf-bare! All the prey is hiding!" He protested, disheartened.

Beesun nodded. "I know, and that's a good thing, because I can test your hunting techniques. Not all the prey is hiding, otherwise no cat would survive during leaf-bare."

Heronpaw silently hissed, then looked around the moor, which was covered in snow. Leaf-bare arrived a moon before Cougarheart became a warrior, and hunting was already hard. Prey was scarcer than he thought it would be, and they could barely catch anything. He sighed, longing for the warm breeze and the soft grass of greenleaf.

Heronpaw turned and sniffed the air, stepping on the cold, soft snow. He let out a growl. *Even if I find any prey, they'll hear me before I can even get in a hunting crouch!*

He looked around, knowing that prey would be easier to spot during this time. However, he was also easier to spot as well, with his black fur. But at least he had a little bit of white on his fur,

unlike the cats who were fully black. He thought of Badgerleap and Lightningpaw, who had almost no white on their fur, and knew that the real challenge was for them.

Heronpaw shook his head. *No, I have to focus on my hunt now.* He sniffed the air and looked around the snowy meadow for any prey. He then spotted a rabbit near a rock, with its back at him. *Found something!*

Heronpaw immediately dropped into a hunting crouch and started creeping toward the rabbit, careful not to make any noise. Then, the wind suddenly changed its direction. The rabbit's ears perked up and it turned around. As soon as it saw Heronpaw, it let out a loud squeak and sprinted away. Heronpaw quickly sprinted toward the rabbit and jumped right on it, digging his claws in its fur. He let out a relieved sigh as he delivered the killing bite on the rabbit. *That's one prey down, I have many more left to go if I want to become a warrior.*

"You can stop now, Heronpaw."

Heronpaw looked up from the vole he just caught and saw Beesun approach him. She nodded, looking proud. "Well done! Your hunting has told me that you will have no problem during all the harsh leaf-bares that will come. Let's go back to camp."

He quickly got up, excited. "So that means I passed my assessment?"

Beesun nodded, proud. "Yes. Now gather all your prey and let's go back to camp. I'll tell Rosestar."

Heronpaw let out a relieved purr and grabbed his vole with his jaws, then rushed toward the area where he put all his other prey. He digged through the snow and nudged the rabbit and the shrew out, then grabbed them as well and followed Beesun, his tail high in the air. He felt like he was about to burst with happiness.

As soon as he entered the camp, Foggypaw sprinted toward him. "Hi, Heronpaw! Did you pass your warrior assessment?"

Heronpaw nodded, the prey in his mouth keeping him from answering. He rushed toward the fresh-kill pile and dropped the prey down, then looked back at his friend. "Yes, I did! What about you?"

"I passed it too!" Foggypaw purred, flicking her tail happily. "And Lightningpaw did too! It's only Needlepaw who hasn't returned yet."

As soon as she said that, Sandypelt entered the camp, followed closely by Needlepaw. When she saw Heronpaw and Foggypaw, she quickly dropped her prey in the fresh-kill pile and rushed toward them.

"I passed my warrior assessment!" She boasted, flicking her tail proudly.

Heronpaw sighed. "Congratulations. So did we."

"Oh." Needlepaw mumbled. "Congratulations, I guess."

Lightningpaw appeared from behind Needlepaw, rolling his eyes. "Can you at least act like you care?"

Needlepaw shrugged and sat down. "I care about myself. Isn't that enough?"

"No!" Lightningpaw hissed, lashing his tail. "You should care about others as well!"

"I guess." Needlepaw shrugged again and licked one of her paws.

Lightningpaw narrowed his eyes, preparing to say something, but Rosestar's call stopped him from doing so.

"Let all cats old enough to run the moor gather beneath the Tallrock for a Clan meeting!"

Needlepaw instantly got up and sprinted toward the Tallrock. Lightningpaw rolled his eyes and followed. Foggypaw padded after them alongside Heronpaw. He sat down next to them and looked up at Rosestar.

As usual, Rosestar only started speaking when everyone was gathered. "Today, four apprentices are ready to become warriors. Foggypaw, Lightningpaw, Needlepaw, and Heronpaw, step forward."

Heronpaw stepped forward, feeling proud. The three other apprentices stepped forward as well and looked up at their leader.

"Do you four promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your lives?" Rosestar asked.

"I do!" Heronpaw enthusiastically meowed.

"I do!" Foggypaw nodded.

"I do." Lightningpaw dipped his head.

"Of course I do!" Needlepaw meowed.

Heronpaw looked at the silver tabby apprentice and let out an exasperated sigh.

"Then, by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior names." Rosestar meowed. "Foggypaw, from this day forward, you will be known as Foggydream."

"Lightningpaw, from this day forward, you will be known as Lightningstep." Rosestar continued.

"Needlepaw, from this day forward, you will be known as Needlestrike." The she-cat added.

Needlestrike let out a proud meow, which annoyed Heronpaw.

"And Heronpaw, from this day forward, you will be known as Heronfall." Rosestar finished.

"Foggydream! Lightningstep! Needlestrike! Heronfall!" The Clan chanted.

Heronfall let out a purr. *I'm finally a warrior! I like my name, I'm so*

glad Rosestar chose it!

"Meeting dismissed." Rosestar meowed and jumped off the Tallrock. As soon as she did, Whitelion and Nightshine rushed toward Heronfall.

"Congratulations!" Whitelion meowed happily.

"Congratulations, my dear." Nightshine purred and licked Heronfall's folded ears. "I'm so proud of you. I'm sure you will be a great warrior."

Heronfall purred. "Thank you! I hope so, too."

His parents licked his ears one more time before padding away. Heronfall looked around, but then he heard a voice behind him.

"Heronfall?"

The tom turned around and saw Clover, the old rogue who joined WindClan when he was still an apprentice, approach him. She dipped her head. "Congratulations, you deserve to become a warrior. And, I'm sorry I didn't tell you this earlier, but thank you. Thank you for giving me an opportunity to join WindClan. It's been a great home so far, and it's much better than my old one."

Heronfall purred. "Thank you! And it's nothing, really. I couldn't bear to leave you alone on the moor to die."

"And that's why you're a good cat." Clover dipped her head. "Anyway, I should go back. I never liked leaf-bare, it's far too cold to stay out."

Heronfall nodded. "I understand!"

The old she-cat turned around and padded toward the elders' den, where she was greeted by Volehiss and Poppyflight. Then, he turned and looked for Cougarheart. Disappointment filled him when he realized that she wasn't going to congratulate him. He lowered his gaze. *Will she ever forgive me? I just want everything to go back to normal, like Mushroomspot said.*.

"Heronfall, are you coming?"

The tom raised his head and saw Foggydream look at him. He tilted his head. "Where?"

"We have to sit vigil, mouse-brain." Needlestrike rolled her eyes. Lightningstep shot her a harsh glare.

Heronfall didn't pay attention to her. Instead, he looked at the sky and realized that the sun was already setting. He blinked, confused. *Did my warrior assessment really take that long?* But it didn't matter. He rushed after the three cats. When he left camp, he sat down in front of the entrance. Foggydream was sitting on his left, while Lightningstep was sitting on his right. Needlestrike was sitting next to Foggydream.

Suddenly, Heronfall shivered. He didn't realize how cold the nights during leaf-bare were. He looked around the moor, which was covered in snow, and he pawed the snowy ground under him. The snow from underneath his paws felt even colder than before.

This is going to be a long and cold night..

Chapter 16

As the sun arose, Heronfall looked up, feeling tired and cold.

My vigil is finally over! I feel so cold, I think I'll get sick!

He looked at the other three cats who were sitting vigil alongside him. Lightningstep looked like he couldn't wait to go back to the warriors' den, Foggydream was barely awake, and Needlestrike was growling.

"You four can speak now, your vigil is over." Frostbreeze meowed and padded out of the camp, shaking her fur. Brownbranch, Cinderstream, and Vinebreeze followed her.

"*Finally*!" Needlestrike growled. "I'm so tired and cold, I feel like I can sleep for a whole moon!"

Cinderstream purred and looked at her daughter. "I know what you mean, but you can't. Tonight is the Gathering, and Rosestar wants all of you to come."

Needlestrike sighed in annoyance. "I wish we didn't have to."

For the first time in his life, Heronfall agreed with Needlestrike. His vigil felt like it lasted forever, and he didn't want to be awake for another night during leaf-bare. But he didn't protest. He got up and nodded. "I think I'll go sleep now."

"It's a good idea." Vinebreeze meowed, flicking his spotted tail. "If you don't wake up until Rosestar calls the meeting, I'll come wake you all up. I doubt you'll still be sleeping by then, but just in case."

"Thanks." Lightningstep sighed.

Heronfall quickly rushed in the camp and padded in the apprentices' den. Tired, he quickly grabbed his nest in his jaws and turned around, padding out. He ran toward the warriors' den and

looked around for an empty spot, then dropped his nest. As soon as he did, he collapsed in it, exhausted. He curled up in a ball and fell asleep.

"Let all cats old enough to run the moor gather beneath the Tallrock for a Clan meeting!"

Heronfall tilted his head, confused, as he left the warriors' den. He just woke up, and Rosestar was already calling the Clan meeting. *Weird, the moon didn't even rise yet. Why are we already going to the Gathering?*

However, he didn't protest. He stretched, then rushed toward the meeting and sat down next to Lightningstep.

"As you all know, tonight is the Gathering." Rosestar meowed. "I've decided it's better to leave earlier because it's very cold today, and I'm sure the other leaders will do the same thing. But before that, I want to announce that Frostbreeze will be moving to the nursery, as she carries Sandypelt's kits."

Heronfall looked toward Frostbreeze, who was sitting next to her mate. He flicked his tail happily. *Kits! WindClan will have new kits by newleaf!*

"Now, follow me, WindClan!" Rosestar meowed, then jumped off the Tallrock and left the camp. Heronfall got up and followed his leader, along with the rest of the Clan.

When he left the camp, a colder breeze than last night ruffled his fur. He shivered, lashing his tail. *It's so cold! I hope the Gathering will end quickly.*

The other cats must have felt the same, because they started shivering and moving faster. Rosestar led them quickly, but slowed down when they approached the path leading to the Fourtrees. Heronfall relaxed, knowing that it was going to be a little warmer when all the four Clans were gathered.

However, when they went downhill, Heronfall felt disappointed. Only ShadowClan was present.

Rosestar jumped on the Great Rock and dipped her head to Crowstar. "Hello."

Crowstar dipped his head back. "It's great to see you, Rosestar. I hope the other Clans will come as quick as we did."

Heronfall sat down, keeping a safe distance from the ShadowClan cats. He didn't really feel comfortable around them, although he knew they weren't as bad as the nursery tales he heard when he was a kit.

Soon, he heard pawsteps. He turned his head and saw RiverClan arrive, led by Shimmerstar. She raised her tail, showing her Clanmates that they can spread out, and jumped on the Great Rock, dipping her head to the other leaders.

Leopardstorm quickly approached him. "Hello, Heronpaw!"

"Heron*fall*. I'm a warrior now." He meowed, flicking his tail proudly.

"Oh? Congratulations!" Leopardstorm purred and sat next to Heronfall, shivering. "I can only imagine how cold your vigil was. I was lucky, because when I became a warrior, leaf-bare wasn't as harsh as it is now. I can't wait for newleaf."

"Same." Heronfall nodded, shivering more violently. "I hope ThunderClan arrives quickly."

Right as he said that, ThunderClan burst into the clearing. Heronfall looked at them, startled, but relaxed when they didn't look aggresive. Beetlestar jumped on the Great Rock, shivering. "I don't want to sound rude, but can we start? I can't feel my paws anymore."

Rosestar nodded. "I think that's a good idea. It's too cold to stay out here for long. Let the Gathering begin!" She yowled.

Heronfall shivered again, then looked at the leaders. Crowstar got up. "I'll start, then."

The ShadowClan leader turned his attention toward the gathered

cats. "Leaf-bare has been harsh on us. Our medicine cat, Silverash, has died due to greencough."

Heronfall blinked, shocked. He looked at the medicine cats and saw that ShadowClan's silver-and-white medicine cat was missing. He lowered his head. *I didn't talk to her at all, but she was a medicine cat, after all. She will be missed in ShadowClan, that's for sure.*

"However, no other cats have been infected. Thank StarClan." Crowstar sighed in relief. "We also have three new apprentices. Turtlepaw, Flickerpaw, and Rootpaw. That is all."

When Crowstar sat down, Rosestar nodded and got up. "Leaf-bare has been harsh on us as well, but we thankfully did not lose any cats. We have five new warriors. Cougarheart, Lightningstep, Foggydream, Needlestrike, and Heronfall."

Heronfall purred, flicking his tail happily.

Beetlestar got up when Rosestar sat back down. "We have a new warrior, Maplewish. Her brother, Pinepaw, however, decided that he wants to become a medicine cat a few days before his warrior assessment, and he is now Rainsong's apprentice."

Heronfall let out a relieved sigh. *Rainsong is old, and she desperately needs an apprentice. And now, with Pinepaw as her apprentice, everything should be alright.*

Beetlestar sat down, resting his tail on his front white paws, and Shimmerstar got up. "Prey has been running well in RiverClan, as the river is full of fish and it hasn't frozen yet. We also have new warriors. Leopardstorm, Streamsong, Honeypool, Flamewhisper, and Dusktrail."

Then, Shimmerstar looked at Beetlestar coldly. "Beetlestar, my warriors have scented ThunderClan on my territory. Not even on Sunningrocks, but on our territory. What do you have to say about this?"

"My warriors have not trespassed into your territory!" Beetlestar hissed, lashing his tail. "Where did you find the scent?"

"Close to our camp." Shimmerstar growled. "Did you send your cats to spy on us? Did you think we wouldn't notice?"

"I would never!" Beetlestar snapped, and Heronfall was afraid that he would attack RiverClan's leader. However, the ThunderClan leader quickly relaxed. "I'll talk about it with my warriors back at camp. Thank you, Shimmerstar. I'll make sure it never happens again."

"It better not." Shimmerstar warned, then sat back down. "That is all I had to announce."

"The Gathering is over then." Crowstar meowed, and jumped off the Great Rock. The other leaders quickly followed.

Heronfall looked at Leopardstorm. "Today's Gathering was pretty short. The moon didn't even reach the highest point in the sky, but I'm glad for that. My paws are already freezing!"

Leopardstorm nodded. "Yes, mine too. All right, I better go. See you at the next Gathering, Heronfall!"

"See you!" Heronfall nodded and got up, looking for his Clan. When he saw them, he quickly rushed toward them.

"Is everyone here?" Hawkgrowl asked, although Heronfall noticed that he sounded a bit careless. He tilted his head, confused, but didn't say anything.

Hawkgrowl looked at his Clanmates again, but when he looked at Heronfall, the black-and-white tom lowered his gaze. The deputy intimidated him.

Hawkgrowl snorted and looked at Rosestar. "Everyone is here, Rosestar. We can go back home."

Rosestar nodded. "All right. Thank you, Hawkgrowl. WindClan, let's go home!"

The tall cream she-cat turned and padded toward WindClan's territory. Heronfall followed, shivering. He couldn't wait to get back and sleep in the warriors' den.

"I can't wait to sleep!" Lightningstep yawned. "I didn't even sleep well after the vigil ended!"

"Me neither." Foggydream meowed. "I don't know why, but something kept me awake."

Needlestrike didn't respond. Instead, she just snorted and padded away from them.

Heronfall rolled his eyes. "I slept quite well, although I'm still tired."

Then, Heronfall saw something with the corner of his eye. He looked to his left and saw Cougarheart look at him. When she saw his head turn, she looked away and snorted.

Heronfall lowered his gaze. *I don't understand why she's mad at me.. She was grieving me, and when I finally told her that I'm still alive.. she gets angry?*

When the cats entered WindClan's territory, a cold breeze ruffled Heronfall's fur. He shivered, longing for the warmth of the warriors' den. As soon as they arrived in the camp, he sprinted toward the warriors' den and let out a relieved sigh, quickly followed by the other warriors. Heronfall quickly lay down in his nest and rested his head on his paws, falling asleep.

Allegiance Update: 4

WindClan

Leader**: Rosestar** - Cream she-cat with green eyes

Deputy: **Hawkgrowl** - Brown tom with black stripes, a white muzzle and a cream belly

Medicine cat: **Wolfstripe** - Dark gray tom with a white muzzle, belly, paws and black stripes

Apprentice, Cloudwatcher - Deaf white she-cat with blue eyes

Warriors: **Brownbranch** - Brown tabby tom

Beesun - Yellow-and-white she-cat with black stripes

Badgerleap - Black tom with white stripes on his face

Otterbounce - Dark brown tom with green eyes

Whitelion - Tall white tom with dark amber eyes

Sandypelt - Cream tabby tom

Skyflower - Black-and-silver she-cat with blue eyes

Nightshine - Black-and-white she-cat with blue eyes

Cinderstream - Pale gray tabby she-cat with a white belly

Mushroomspot - Cream tom with brown and black spots and a white belly

Vinebreeze - Gray tom with cream spots and a white belly

Dovestorm - Gray-and-cream she-cat with green eyes

Cougarheart - Black she-cat with a light brown head, spots and belly, a black ear and a cream ear with green eyes

Heronfall - Black-and-white tom with white spots, blue eyes, and folded ears

Lightningstep - Black tom with a white marking on his face

Foggydream - Gray-and-white tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Needlestrike - Silver tabby she-cat with black ears and paws

Queens: **Frostbreeze** - Fluffy gray-and-white she-cat with blue eyes. Expecting Sandypelt's kits

Elders: **Volehiss** - Brown tom with a cream belly and white stripes

Poppyflight - Brown-and-white she-cat with a ginger face

Clover - Very pale blue-gray she-cat with yellow eyes. Former rogue

ThunderClan

Leader: **Beetlestar** - Brown-and-white tabby tom

Deputy: **Gingerflame** - Dark ginger tom with amber eyes

Medicine cat: **Rainsong** - Gray-and-silver spotted she-cat

Apprentice, Pinepaw - Dark brown tabby tom with a cream belly

Warriors: **Acornfall** - Ginger-and-brown she-cat with a white belly and paws

Tigerfrost - Dark brown tabby tom with white paws and a cream belly

Thornstrike - Golden-brown tom with black stripes

Lilydream - White she-cat with silver stripes

Flowershade - Black-and-white speckled she-cat with blue eyes

Berrybrush - Brown-and-cream she-cat with green eyes

Twigheart - Pale brown she-cat with green eyes

Smokegrowl - Pale gray tom with blue eyes

Goldenwing - Golden tabby she-cat

Maplewish - Pale cream she-cat with brown stripes

Queens: **Cherryleaf** - Fluffy ginger-and-white she-cat with green eyes. Expecting Thornstrike's kits

ShadowClan

Leader: **Crowstar** - Black tom with a gray belly and paws

Deputy: **Spiderthorn** - Black and reddish-brown tom with amber eyes

Medicine cat: **Foxfeather** - Ginger-and-white tom with black legs

Warriors: **Hazelberry** - Gray, brown and white she-cat with green eyes

Apprentice, Rootpaw - Gray tom with black stripes

Tinyshadow - Small black tom

Mousefang - Gray tom with a black tail and blue eyes

Eaglefall - Ginger-and-brown tom with a white muzzle and belly

Apprentice, Flickerpaw - Black-and-ginger tom with white paws and gray spots on his face

Owlcry - Brown she-cat with green eyes

Oaktail - Pale brown tom with amber eyes

Antscreech - Black tom with dark ginger dapples

Apprentice, Turtlepaw - Tortoiseshell she-cat

Stemfang - Ginger-and-white tabby tom

Ivycloud - White she-cat with brown dapples and blue eyes

Sunnyheart - Tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat

Elders: **Spikehiss** - Dark brown tom with spiky fur, black stripes and a white face

RiverClan

Leader: **Shimmerstar** - Silver she-cat with white spots and blue eyes

Deputy: **Splashpelt** - Brown tom with gray stripes and a white belly

Medicine cat: **Jaymoon** - Black-and-gray tabby tom

Apprentice, Mosspaw - Ginger-and-cream she-cat with a white belly and amber eyes

Warriors: **Stonefall** - Gray tom

Eelstrike - Black she-cat with white stripes and amber eyes

Brackenfall - Dark ginger tom with white paws and a black-striped tail

Echolight - Fluffy dark gray she-cat with a white belly and paws

Birchsong - Dark brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

Blackstream - Black tom with gray stripes and blue eyes

Amberdawn - Cream-and-white tabby she-cat with amber eyes

Leopardstorm - Golden tom with black spots and amber eyes

Streamsong - White she-cat with silver paws

Honeypool - Golden-and-cream tabby she-cat

Flamewhisper - Ginger tom with blue eyes

Dusktrail - Brown-and-cream tom

Elders: **Bearcloud** - Black tom with a stump for a tail, yellow eyes and a white muzzle

Cats Outside Clans

Rattlesnake - Brown tom with black stripes and a long, white tail

Nectar - Black-and-cream she-cat

Chapter 17

Heronfall lowered his head and took a hungry bite from the shrew he was eating. A few weeks passed since he and the others became warriors, and leaf-bare was just getting harsher and colder every day. He let out a sigh, missing the warm breeze of greenleaf.

"Oh, hi Heronfall!"

The tom raised his head and saw Mushroomspot approach him. He dipped his head to the older warrior. "Hello there!"

Mushroomspot sat down and took a scrawny-looking rabbit from the pile. "What are you doing?"

"Nothing much." Heronfall meowed and took another bite from the shrew. "Just enjoying this prey. You?"

"Eh." Mushroomspot shrugged and took a bite from the rabbit. "Me too. I honestly can't wait for greenleaf! My paws are freezing every day."

"Me neither!" Heronfall meowed, hissing as a cold breeze ruffled his fur.

Mushroomspot purred in amusement. "The cold wind doesn't really bother me anymore. It's just my paws that still get cold. By the way, remember when you wanted to catch a bird when you were a kit?"

Heronfall raised his head in surprise and looked at the older warrior. *He remembered!*

He nodded. "I do, but I haven't managed to catch one yet. I'm hoping that I can catch one next newleaf."

"I'm sure you will." Mushroomspot meowed, then hesitated before speaking. "And.. Cougarheart?"

Heronfall froze. He slowly raised his eyes toward his friend.

"Cougarheart?"

"Have you two.. mended your friendship?"

Heronfall felt like his heart was shattered with regret and pain. He sighed, shaking his head. "No. I've tried talking to her, but she just.. won't listen. I don't even understand why."

Mushroomspot flicked his tail, then looked around. "Listen, I have an idea. I think she's out of camp right now, so you should find her and try talk to her about it. Stay calm though, and don't try to force her to listen. Just let her do it by herself."

"That could work." Heronfall nodded slowly, finishing his shrew. He got up and licked his muzzle, looking at Mushroomspot. "Thanks!"

"No problem." His friend dipped his head, then Heronfall turned and sprinted out of camp.

Instantly, he was greeted by another gust of cold wind, and by the freezing cold snow underneath his paws. He hesitated, longing to go back to his warm and cozy nest, but he knew he couldn't. Well, he could, but he didn't want to. He had to find Cougarheart as soon as possible. She had to listen to him, one way or another.

Heronfall looked around and sniffed the air, instantly catching the familiar scent of Cougarheart. He followed it, leaving the camp behind, and passing the giant rock that stood next to the entrance. He shivered as the snow clung to his fur, but he continued moving. *I want to get back to camp as soon as possible. And hopefully after I talk with Cougarheart.*

He stopped suddenly, staring ahead in shock. A little further ahead, he saw Cougarheart standing in front of a brown rogue. He felt his heart drop with shock and confusion. *Is she.. meeting in secret with a rogue?*

Before he could do anything, however, Cougarheart raised an unsheathed paw defensively and took a step back. The rogue bared his teeth and threw himself at the WindClan warrior, pinning her to

the ground. Cougarheart looked up at him, said something angrily, and the rogue raked his claws across the she-cat's face. Then, he grabbed Cougarheart's scruff and dragged her away.

"*No!*" Heronfall called out, rushing forward. The rogue raised his head and let go of Cougarheart's scruff. He sprinted forward, lashing out at Heronfall with his claws. The tom backed off in shock, and the rogue quickly went back to dragging Cougarheart away. The she-cat looked dizzy and didn't move much.

Heronfall looked after them, panicking. *What should I do? If I follow them, I might risk getting attacked, or even killed..*

Then, he came up with an idea. *WindClan! WindClan will help me!*

He turned around and sprinted toward the camp, running as fast as he could. As soon as he burst into camp, the other cats looked at him, confused and startled. He looked around for the leader, his eyes wide with desperation. "Rosestar! Rosestar, where are you?"

The tall and graceful she-cat appeared from her den, tilting her head. "Heronfall? What happened?"

"It's Cougarheart!" Heronfall explained. "She.. a rogue took her!"

Rosestar's eyes lit up with alarm, but before she could answer, Skyflower let out a wail and rushed toward them. "A rogue *what?*"

Heronfall looked at Cougarheart's mother. "I saw everything, a rogue attacked her and dragged her away! I tried to follow them, but.."

"And you *let him* do that?" Skyflower stared at him menacingly, unsheathing her claws. "You should have attacked the rogue, not let him take my daughter away!"

"That's enough!" Rosestar hissed, stepping between them.

Heronfall looked at the leader, grateful for her intervention.

The leader looked around. "Hawkgrowl, Heronfall, Skyflower, Mushroomspot, Whitelion, and Otterbounce, you will come with

me. We're going to get Cougarheart back." Then, she looked at Heronfall. "Lead the way."

Surprised, Heronfall nodded and turned around, sprinting out of camp. He instantly picked up Cougarheart's scent and followed it, aware that the other cats were following him closely. When he reached the spot where he last saw Cougarheart, he followed the fresh paw-prints in the snow.

"Careful!"

Heronfall raised his head, noticing that they were very close to the barn. It was a very tall Twoleg den that was made out of red stones. He stared at it in awe, remembering that he walked past it when Rattlesnake and Nectar kicked him out of their den. *It feels like it's been a lifetime since then.*

"The rogue group must be back." Rosestar growled. "The one that attacked us moons ago!"

Heronfall froze, remembering the story he heard from Volehiss and Poppyflight when he was a kit. The rogue group that attacked WindClan moons ago took Cougarheart as their prisoner. *Clover's group.*

Suddenly, a thought struck him. *Has Clover been working with them all along?*

But he quickly pushed the thought away. *No, that's impossible. And even if she has, now is not the time to think about that.*

"Clan cats!" He heard a hiss from the barn.

"Quiet!" Another cat snapped. Then, a tall, silver-gray tom jumped over the fence that was separating the patrol from the barn, and approached them warily. Both his ears were torn, and he was missing an eye. He had scars all over his fur, which made Heronfall step back, feeling intimidated. *That cat isn't one to be messed with.*

"What do you want?" The rogue growled, lashing his tail.

Rosestar stepped forward, baring her teeth. "Shark."

"Oh, we meet again." Shark grinned, flicking his tail. "I remember you very clearly, yes.. you and your stupid leader were the reason why my rogue group lost that fight."

Heronfall took another step backwards, realizing that the intimidating silver-gray tom was the rogue group's leader.

"Coming to get your friend back, hm?" Shark asked, unsheathing his claws. "Well, that's not possible."

"And why not?" Skyflower padded forward, growling and lashing her tail, her hackles rising.

Otterbounce padded next to his mate, challenging the rogue leader. "Give our daughter back."

"I don't think I will." Shark flicked his tail threateningly. "Now, if you try to get her back, we won't hesitate to attack your little patrol, and this time we won't lose again like last time."

Rosestar hissed, taking another step forward. "We'll do anything for our Clanmate."

"Hmm." Shark murmured, flicking his tail. Suddenly, about ten other rogues approached them from the barn, stopping behind their leader. "Are you sure?"

Heronfall stared at the group in disbelief. All the rogues were massive and sturdy, each one of them having crisscrossed scars on their fur. He hesitated.

Rosestar stared at the rogues in shock, then bared her teeth. "Fine, but we'll get our Clanmate back, one way or another. WindClan, retreat!"

"What?" Skyflower spat, stepping in front of Rosestar. "So you're just going to leave my daugher alone with.. with these beasts? You know what they're capable of!"

"Watch your tongue, Clan cat." Shark warned, baring his white, shiny fangs. "We can shred your little patrol easily."

"Just try!" Whitelion growled, unsheathing his claws.

Rosestar flicked her tail quickly. "There is no need to spill blood. I said, retreat."

Heronfall stared at his leader in shock, then looked back at the rogues. *Is she really going to leave Cougarheart alone with them?*

As Heronfall's Clanmates followed Rosestar back to camp, she looked at him reassuringly once they left the barn far behind them. "Don't worry, we'll get Cougarheart back soon. Just not today."

Without thinking, Heronfall stopped. Rosestar stopped too and looked at him, confused.

He took a deep breath before speaking. "Rosestar, we can't risk anything. The rogues could easily hurt Cougarheart. Or worse, *kill* her! We have to do something *now*, and if you won't do anything, then I'll join the rogue group and get her back myself."

Rosestar's eyes widened in shock. "You can't do that!"

"No, no." Heronfall said quickly, pawing the ground with his white paws anxiously. "I won't join them for good. I'll try to gain their trust, then get Cougarheart out and come back to camp. It might take a while, but I'll do anything to get her back."

Rosestar hesitated. "I'm not sure that's a good idea. We could launch a surprise attack on the group tonight."

"No, WindClan might lose cats." Heronfall protested. "But, if I do this, no cat will die."

"You might." Rosestar whispered, looking at him with a worried expression. "Or Cougarheart."

"Then I'm willing to risk it." Heronfall dipped his head. "With all respect, Rosestar, I must try to get Cougarheart back. I can't bear not knowing what's going to happen to her. Please, you have to trust me!"

Rosestar hesitated once more, looking toward her Clanmates. Then,

she looked back at Heronfall and sighed. "Very well, Heronfall. You have time until tomorrow night. If you won't return by then, I'll send a patrol to rescue you and attack the rogues."

Heronfall hesitated, unsure if he had enough time to gain the rogues' trust. He was about to protest, but he sighed and nodded. He was going to do anything for Cougarheart, even if she was still mad at him. He was going to try anything to save her. "Of course."

"I'm proud to have you as my warrior." Rosestar dipped her head. "When I get back to camp, I'll tell the Clan about your plan. Now go, and be careful!"

Without wasting any more time, Heronfall spun around and sprinted toward the barn. He lashed his tail on his way, thinking about what he was going to say to the rogues. He jumped over the fence quickly and landed on the other side. He was about to approach the barn when a voice stopped him.

"Hey, Clan cat, stop right there!"

Heronfall instantly froze as he was approached by two cats: a brown tom and a white she-cat. He stared at the white rogue in shock, recognizing her. She was the cat that tried to protect him from his parents when he left to search for Meadow a few days after her death, way back in his first life.

"What are you doing here and what do you want?" The brown rogue's hiss snapped him back from his thoughts. "Do you want your Clanmate back? Shark already told you that we won't give her back, so get going!"

Heronfall took a deep breath. "No." He managed to speak, gathering all the courage he had left in him. "I want to join your rogue group."

"What?" The white she-cat tilted her head, looking dumbfounded.

Heronfall raised his head, trying to look as confident as possible. "Yes. I've always hated Cougarheart and WindClan, and now that you took her as a prisoner, I want to be your ally." He lied, hoping

that his voice was convincing enough.

"Hmm." The white she-cat mumbled. "I don't know about that. Why would you hate your Clanmate?"

Heronfall tilted his head, disdainful. "Just because Cougarheart is my Clanmate doesn't mean that I can't dislike her. She hates me because of a stupid argument we had. And she's simply *unbearable*! I want her to pay for what she's done." He lied, fully aware that he was breathing heavily. He held his breath, hoping that the rogues didn't notice.

"I'm not too sure about that, but I can understand your point. We'll have to let Shark decide." The brown rogue said, looking like he didn't believe a word of what Heronfall said. "But until then, we have to wait for the other one."

Heronfall tilted his head, confused. "The other one?"

"Oh, you didn't know?" The white she-cat snorted. "There's one more Clan cat that works for us. That cat is the one that led us into your territory many moons ago and told us to attack your Clan. He's so desperate to lead your Clan that he needs our help."

Heronfall instantly froze, struck by a painful realization. *One of my Clanmates is working with these rogues. They are the reason they came here. But.. who?*

He looked toward the direction of the camp, his thoughts racing to all of his Clanmates. *Beesun, maybe? No, wait, she hates rogues, and she's a she-cat. Needlestrike, maybe.. she wasn't there when that fight happened, but maybe she's working with them now.*

As Heronfall was panicking and trying to guess who the other cat was, a figure appeared in the distance. He raised his head and looked at the cat.

But it wasn't Beesun, nor Needlestrike.

It was Hawkgrowl, the Clan deputy himself.

Chapter 18

Heronfall's blue eyes grew wide with shock and disbelief as Hawkgrowl approached him and the other two rogues. The Clan deputy has been working with the rogue group all along, and no one knew.

Hawkgrowl jumped over the fence and approached them, dipping his head toward the two rogues. "Hello, Snowdrop. Hello, Mudslide."

The two rogues dipped their heads back, and Heronfall felt his heart drop when Hawkgrowl looked at him. He snorted. "Did you two catch another one?"

"Oh, him? No, actually." Mudslide meowed. "He came here willingly, claiming that he wants to join our group. Should we trust him?"

"Oh?" Hawkgrowl tilted his head and studied Heronfall with his dark amber eyes. "Why?"

"Well.." Heronfall's heart pounded against his chest. He wanted to run away, but he stood his ground. "I..I've hated Cougarheart for a long time, and I'm sick of WindClan. And, since they captured Cougarheart, I want to be part of them."

"Hmm." Hawkgrowl mumbled. "You two haven't talked in quite a long time, and she does seem upset with you. I guess we can let you join, although I will keep a *very* close eye on you, so don't try anything funny." He narrowed his eyes distrustfully. "Now, since you're here, I assume you know that I was the one who led this rogue group to WindClan's camp?"

Heronfall nodded, his mind buzzing from all the new information.

"Rosestar is weak and a fool, and so was the leader before her."

Hawkgrowl spat. "They're making WindClan weak. They need a new leader, one like me! *I* will lead them to glory!"

Heronfall's tail lashed, trying not to betray his anger. *I'll make sure Rosestar hears about this, don't you worry.*

"You agree with me, don't you?" Hawkgrowl asked, studying him with a cold, expressionless gaze.

"I.. yes, of course I do. Rosestar is weak." Heronfall had to agree with him. He wanted to bite back his words, but he had to make the deputy believe that he truly hated WindClan. Otherwise, he would be done for.

Hawkgrowl continued to stare at Heronfall for a few more heartbeats, but then he nodded slowly. "Good. Let's go back to the barn, then." He meowed, then looked at the two rogues. "Snowdrop, Mudslide, lead Heronfall to Cougarheart and.." He whispered something that Heronfall didn't hear. "And I'll talk with Shark." He raised his voice.

Heronfall tilted his head. He didn't like that Hawkgrowl lowered his voice when telling the plan to the rogues, but he was quickly pushed toward the barn by the two rogues.

"Come on, let's go see your enemy!" Snowdrop purred, holding her tail high and nudging him toward the barn.

Heronfall hesitated and looked at Hawkgrowl, who was padding towards Shark. The rogue leader was watching them intently from the base of a tree. He then turned his attention toward the WindClan deputy.

When Heronfall entered the barn, he blinked twice, not realizing how dark it was inside. When his eyes got used to the darkness, he looked around. A few rogues were sitting and talking to each other, and he guessed that the rest of the group was patrolling or hunting outside.

"Who's this?" A ginger she-cat growled, lashing her tail.

Snowdrop looked at her. "Sunset, this is- uh.."

"Heronfall." He meowed.

"Heronfall." Snowdrop nodded. "He wants to join our rogue group because we have his Clanmate Cougarheart, and he supposedly hates her. May you let us inspect our prisoner?"

"Hmm." Sunset snorted. "Does Shark know about this?"

"Hawkgrowl is telling him about it right now." Mudslide answered, flicking his tail. "Now move, or do you want me to tell Shark that you're not listening to your orders?"

Sunset narrowed her eyes and stood up, padding away.

Heronfall's eyes lit up with shock when he saw Cougarheart crouched in the left corner of the barn. She was fully awake and was looking around scornfully. She was bleeding from a few wounds and was muttering insults at the rogues. However, she froze when she saw Heronfall, and she looked up at him in shock. "Heronfall?"

"That's right." Snowdrop purred. "He came and joined us because he hates you, flea-pelt!"

"Oh." Cougarheart murmured, looking at Heronfall in disbelief and shock.

The tom's heart ached in pain. *That's not the truth, you'll understand what's going on soon.*

"Well, are you two just going to stare at each other?" Mudslide rolled his eyes. "Come on, Heronfall, hurt her!"

"What?" The tom looked at him with a shocked expression.

"Well, you heard him! Hurt her!" Snowdrop hissed. "You hate her, after all. Or are you scared?"

Heronfall took a deep breath and looked down at Cougarheart, who stared back at him in shock. He sighed and padded forward. *Please forgive me..*

He unsheathed one of his white paws and shakily raised it, resting it on Cougarheart's shoulder. She looked up at him, and her sad expression shocked Heronfall. *She hasn't been this sad ever since..*

"This is boring!" Snowdrop rolled her eyes her eyes and bared her teeth.

Heronfall looked at her, feeling hurt. *Is she really that same, white loner who tried to help me when I was a kit? I thought she was nice.*

"Mudslide, Snowdrop!"

Heronfall turned his head and saw Shark enter the barn. He gestured toward the two rogues. "Come over here for a second."

"All right." Mudslike nodded, then looked back at Heronfall. "When we come back, your enemy here better have some new scratches on her back!"

Heronfall let out a growl as the two rogues left, then looked at Cougarheart. He lowered his voice. "Listen, I'm here to save you."

"Shut up." Cougarheart hissed. "I know why you're here. You hate me, that's what you told the two rogues. You want to hurt me."

"No, listen!" Heronfall whispered, desperate. "I lied to them! I came here all by myself, pretending to want to join Shark's group so I can get you out of here."

Cougarheart looked at him, shocked. "You..You want to help me?"

"Of course!" Heronfall whispered. "Now, be quiet and don't tell anyone anything. I'll try to get you out of here by tonight."

Suddenly, Heronfall heard paw steps. Panicking, he raked his claws across Cougarheart's back, who let out a pained yowl. She stared at him with a hateful gaze.

He froze. "I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" He whispered.

"Heronfall."

The tom turned around and saw Shark approach him. He looked at him, trying not to shake with fear. "Yes?"

"Is it true that you hate Cougarheart?" Shark asked.

Heronfall nodded. "Yes, that's why I joined. She deserves to be taken away from her Clan and pay for her horrible actions."

"Good, good." Shark nodded, looking impressed. "I've decided that we'll kill her tomorrow. You might not know this, but your stupid Clan killed some of our cats. We killed one of their queens afterwards, but that was only to avenge the cats we've lost. But it wasn't enough. More WindClan cats need to be killed. And *you* will be the one who kills her."

Heronfall stared at him, wide-eyed from shock. He couldn't believe it. *They actually want me to* kill *her?*

"I trust you, Heronfall." Shark meowed. "I trust Hawkgrowl with my life, and if he says you're worth keeping, then I trust you as well. You will guard her this night, and if she tries to escape, don't hesitate to attack her. Got it?"

"Got it." Heronfall nodded, trying to stop his legs from shaking.

Shark nodded. "Good. And don't try anything funny, or else." He warned, unsheathing his long and curved claws.

Heronfall took a deep breath. "Yes, Shark."

"Good. I'll send some cats to hunt, then." Shark meowed, then padded away. Before he left the barn, he looked back one more time. "And don't forget what I said."

Heronfall looked after him, shocked and scared, then sat in front of Cougarheart without saying anything to her. *The other rogues must not suspect a thing.*

When all the other cats were asleep, Heronfall turned around toward Cougarheart, lowering his voice. "We have to get out of here *now*. They want me to kill you tomorrow! They're crazy!"

But Cougarheart didn't move. Instead, she looked down at her paws, her ears drooped. "I deserve it. I've been.. I've treated you so unfairly, Heronfall, and for no reason, either. It wasn't your-"

"Listen." Heronfall sighed, cutting her off. "We have to get out of here fast, okay? We can talk about this back at camp, but I won't leave you here. You can say whatever you want, but you're coming with me back to WindClan right now."

Cougarheart hesitated, then nodded. Her eyes betrayed her surprise and gratitude. But she didn't get up. "Don't you think it's weird, though? You joined them today, and yet they trusted you enough to let you guard me alone. What if it's a trap?"

Heronfall looked around and nodded slowly. He did consider that option, and knew that it was very likely. But either way, they had to escape tonight. "It most likely is, but we have to leave now. If anyone will ambush us, you will run back to camp as quick as possible and get help. But let's go. *Now*."

Heronfall didn't wait for her answer. Instead, he crouched down and creeped toward the exit of the barn, trying not to make a sound. He heard Cougarheart's paw steps behind him, and he sighed in relief.

When they left the barn, Heronfall raised his head and looked at the sky. He sent a silent prayer to StarClan, then stalked as quietly as possible toward WindClan's territory.

"I knew it!"

Heronfall froze and spun around. He saw Hawkgrowl approach them, snarling. "I knew that you would try to get her out! Shark trusted you too easily. He's a coward!"

"Go! Run!" Heronfall hissed and spun around, sprinting away from the barn. Cougarheart rushed after him, running as fast as she could. They jumped over the fence and ran toward the moor, hoping that they could get back to camp safely.

Suddenly, Heronfall heard heavy paw steps behind them. He took a

quick glance behind them and let out a surprised hiss when he saw a bunch of rogues following them. *Oh, StarClan, we're not going to make it!*

"WindClan, attack!"

Heronfall looked ahead in shock as Rosestar and some of his Clanmates sprinted out of the bushes and jumped at the rogues. He stopped running and looked at the fight, caught by surprise.

Cougarheart stopped and looked back as well, confused. "What are they doing here?"

"It doesn't matter. Let's go, come on!" Heronfall hissed and nudged Cougarheart forward. Only then did he realize how many wounds Cougarheart actually had, and how much blood she was losing. *Oh StarClan, why us?*

"Over here!"

Heronfall raised his head and saw Wolfstripe and Cloudwatcher look at them from behind a bush. He helped Cougarheart walk over to them, then sat down next to her.

"What were you doing here?" Heronfall asked as Wolfstripe and Cloudwatcher got up and started inspecting Cougarheart's wounds.

"Rosestar wanted to wait near the barn, just in case you managed to get out this night." Wolfstripe meowed, picking up some herbs with his mouth. "And it looks like it was a smart choice."

Cloudwatcher nodded, but then the deaf cat's ears perked up, although she couldn't hear. She raised her head and looked past the bush. Her eyes widened instantly and she nudged Wolfstripe.

Heronfall looked past the bush and saw a brown-and-white tom sprint straight at them. *Uh oh!*

Wolfstripe threw himself at the rogue, pinning him down and snarling. He looked at them. "Heronfall, Cougarheart, go back to camp now! Take Cloudwatcher with you. I'll come back as fast as possible!"

Cloudwatcher seemed to understand, but she didn't dare move. Heronfall gently nudged the deaf medicine cat apprentice, then helped Cougarheart get up and rushed toward the camp alongside his friend. Cloudwatcher followed them closely.

When they entered the camp, Heronfall noticed that it was nearly empty. Clover, one of the cats left behind, approached him quickly. "What's going on?"

Heronfall fell behind, letting Cloudwatcher lead Cougarheart to the medicine cats' den.

"Rosestar told us that you left to join the rogue group and save Cougarheart, and it seems like it was true." Clover murmured. "So they're back, aren't they?"

"You helped them, didn't you?" Heronfall growled without thinking. "You were a spy! You only joined us to spy on us and tell your group our secrets!"

"Wha- no!" Clover protested, her eyes wide with shock. "I was not spying for them! They really drove me off, and-"

"You!" Mudslide snarled, appearing in camp. "You stupid, pathetic old cat!"

Heronfall spun around to stare at him.

Clover unsheathed her claws and arched her back, although Heronfall noticed that the she-cat was in pain. That was enough for him, because he threw himself at Mudslide and pinned him down. "Leave her alone, you fox-heart!"

Heronfall growled and slashed his claws across Mudslide's flank. He hasn't truly fought a cat before, but he wasn't scared. He was ready to defend his Clanmates. He might have been a scared, defenseless kit when his mother first attacked him, but he wasn't a kit anymore. And from now on, he was going to stand up for himself.

Suddenly, Nightshine ran toward them and nudged Heronfall off of Mudslide, then growled and raked her claws across the rogue's

belly, who helplessly tried to fight back. She then looked at Heronfall and Clover. "Back to your dens, now!"

Heronfall dipped his head gratefully to his mother, but then hesitated. "Shouldn't I go and fight?"

"No." Nightshine shook her head. She backed off and let Mudslide run off. "Go back to your den, Heronfall. You deserve to rest. We'll take it from here."

"Thank you, mother." Heronfall meowed and nuzzled Nightshine.

The she-cat purred. "I'm glad you're back. Now go!"

Heronfall nodded and turned around, but stopped when he saw Clover. Guilt nagged at his fur as he remembered his accusations from before. "Clover, I.. I'm sorry, it wasn't right to accuse you of betraying us like that. I don't know what came over me, I.."

Clover looked at him, then broke into an amused purr. "It's all right, don't worry. I really don't pay attention to those types of things anymore."

Heronfall blinked in surprise. He still felt guilty. "I really mean it, I'm sorry."

"I know, don't worry." Clover looked at him warmly. "I'm not upset. Really! Now go and check on your friend. I'll be fine."

Heronfall nodded, relieved, and padded toward the medicine cats' den. Cloudwatcher was now pressing some herbs on Cougarheart's wounds. The she-cat was hissing in pain, and Heronfall sat down near the entrance, looking at them. His thoughts were racing to the fight that was happening not far from camp, to Hawkgrowl, to Wolfstripe, and then to Cougarheart.

Unsure what to do, he lay down and watched Cloudwatcher help Cougarheart, wincing from time to time when the warrior hissed from pain.

StarClan, please, let us win the fight against these fox-hearted beasts.

Chapter 19

When Heronfall opened his eyes, he was lying on a nest in the medicine cats' den. Confused, he got up and looked around. But then he remembered what happened. *The fight!*

He rushed toward Cougarheart, who was lying in her nest without moving. He let out a relieved sigh when he saw one of her paws twitch. *I must have fallen asleep,* he thought, and padded out of the den.

He was surprised to see the whole Clan back in camp, spread out in the clearing. Rosestar looked at him from her spot on the Tallrock. "There you are, Heronfall! We have been waiting for you."

The tom tilted his head and padded forward, looking at the leader.

"I wanted to thank you." Rosestar dipped her head. "If it wasn't for your bravery, we would have never found out about Hawkgrowl's true intentions. And you brought Cougarheart home again. WindClan thanks you, and we are proud to have you as our warrior."

As the cats around him started to chant his name, Heronfall felt proud of himself. He felt like he was going to burst with happiness. Soon, the cats fell quiet again, and Rosestar continued speaking.

"We have won the fight, thank StarClan, but not without two heavy losses." Rosestar sighed. "Both Brownbranch and Wolfstripe were killed in battle."

Heronfall froze, and he looked at the two bodies in front of the Tallrock. His eyes fell on Wolfstripe's lifeless body, feeling like the ground shook underneath his paws.

The kind medicine cat who helped him when he first joined WindClan was now dead. Regret nagged at his fur as he realized that he has hardly spoken to the medicine cat in his second life, and

now he was dead.

He was a very good medicine cat, and will be missed dearly. I just wish I got to know him better, and Brownbranch was a good warrior. May StarClan welcome both of them.

"However, we must move on." Rosestar meowed, her eyes glistening with grief. "As most of you know, I lost one life in the battle. And thankfully, Shark was killed. The battle stopped after that." She explained, mostly for the cats who stayed in camp. "After the fight ended, I exiled Hawkgrowl from WindClan. For the cats who don't know, he was the one who led the rogue group to our camp all those moons ago. He was using them to become leader. I only found out about this because I saw him fighting against us and chasing Heronfall and Cougarheart back home. He also tried to kill me, but Brownbranch gave his life to save mine. If any of you see him on our territory, you have my permission to kill him."

Then Rosestar raised her head, flicking her tail happily. "I have no idea who the new leader of the rogue group is, but a gray rogue told me to stop the fight because it was pointless to continue fighting without Shark. I'm not sure if they left, but they said they would. I don't think they'll bother us again."

"What happened to Hawkgrowl?" Poppyflight hissed. "That excuse of a cat better not return!"

"I'm sure he won't." Rosestar dipped her head. "After he killed Brownbranch, a few cats attacked him. He wanted to go back to the rogue group after the fight, but they refused to accept him."

"They *refused* him?" Heronfall suddenly spoke out, surprised. "But he worked for them!"

"Indeed." Rosestar nodded. "One of their cats said that it was all Hawkgrowl's fault, and that Shark would still be alive if it wasn't for him. The last time I saw Hawkgrowl was when we came back to camp. He was walking alongside the river, far away from our territory. I have no idea where he wants to go, but I don't think he'll come back."

As the gathered cats let out relieved sighs, Rosestar continued. "We need, however, a new deputy, and then we can hold a vigil for our lost Clanmates. I hope StarClan hears and approves of my choice."

Then, Rosestar looked at the gathered cats. "Whitelion will be WindClan's new deputy. You have been a strong and loyal warrior, and I trust you to lead this Clan once I lose my final life. Do you accept?"

Heronfall started purring, looking at his father.

The white tom looked surprised, but he respectfully nodded. "It's truly an honor, Rosestar. Yes, I accept." Whitelion meowed, stepping forward. "I promise to never let WindClan down, and I will do my best to protect it."

"Whitelion! Whitelion!" The cats chanted. Heronfall was one of the loudest voices, chanting proudly for his father.

"We will now sit vigil for Brownbranch and Wolfstripe." Rosestar meowed. "The cats closest to them may sit vigil now."

Heronfall hesitated, wondering if he should sit vigil for them, when he heard a voice behind him.

"Heronfall?"

He spun around, but relaxed when he saw Cougarheart approach him.

"Can we..Can we talk outside of camp, please?" She asked imploringly.

"You need rest." Heronfall shook his head.

"Please, it's important." Cougarheart begged. "I'll rest afterwards. Cloudwatcher is sitting vigil for Wolfstripe, anyway."

Heronfall hesitated, then sighed. "Fine, let's go."

Cougarheart purred, then limped out of camp. Heronfall followed her through the snowy moor until they reached the border with

RiverClan. There, she sat down in front of him. "Nobody can hear us from here."

Heronfall nodded and sat down in front of her, flicking his tail and watching her, unsure what to say.

Cougarheart was the first to break the silence. She sighed. "Listen, I'm.. thank you. You risked your life joining the rogue group for me. It went pretty well, but it could have been a lot worse. You could have lost your life, and yet you came to my rescue, after.. after everything"

Heronfall pawed the ground, unsure what to say, but Cougarheart continued.

"I'm so, so sorry for everything I've said. When you told me that you're Heronkit.." Cougarheart took a deep breath. "I was just so shocked. I've been grieving you for so long, and yet you were still alive. And you didn't tell me.. why?"

"Well.." Heronfall began. "When I died, a StarClan cat told me to never tell anyone that I had a second chance at life. But I just couldn't watch you suffer, so I did." He meowed.

Cougarheart's eyes widened.

"And the night after I revealed to you everything, I was visited by that StarClan cat once again. I.. he wanted to keep me in StarClan. That was the punishment for telling you the truth, and.."

Heronfall started to explain everything to Cougarheart, how he spoke to Featherwish and how the former RiverClan deputy let him go back to WindClan. He was sure she would understand, and he was hoping that she wouldn't be upset again.

When Heronfall finished his story, Cougarheart's eyes were wide with horror. "And I got upset at you because.. I'm so, so sorry! I didn't know.. I was just so angry, and.."

"It's fine." Heronfall sighed, but let out a surprised shriek as Cougarheart quickly limped forward and nuzzled Heronfall.

"I was so sad when I thought I lost you, and when you told me the truth, I..I just felt so betrayed, but now I understand why you didn't tell me earlier. I'm sorry, I'm such a horrible friend!" Cougarheart wailed, her ears drooped and her eyes wide with regret.

"No, you're not." Heronfall sighed, looking at Cougarheart. "You just didn't know the truth, that's all. You had every right to be upset, you just.. exaggerated a bit. But now that you know the truth, can we..can we be friends again?"

"What kind of question is that?" Cougarheart hissed, which made Heronfall jump with surprise, but he quickly relaxed when he realized that she was joking. "Of course! I've been wanting to apologize for some time, but I just didn't know how to approach you or what to say.. I'm so sorry."

"It's fine, really. I forgive you." Heronfall purred, then he looked up at the sky. The sun was already at its highest point, but white, fluffy clouds were covering it. He looked back at Cougarheart. "Anyway, we should go back to camp. You still need rest, you know?"

"Right." Cougarheart meowed, getting up. She started limping toward the camp, and Heronfall walked alongside her, ready to help her if she needed it.

"I can walk on my own, thank you very much!" Cougarheart hissed, but Heronfall knew she was joking. He purred, realizing how much he had missed Cougarheart's company.

Now that Hawkgrowl is exiled, the rogue group is gone, and Cougarheart forgave me, everything should go back to normal. I missed Cougarheart so much. I'm so glad she finally forgave me.

Chapter 20

A moon had passed since the fight against the rogue group. Wolfstripe and Brownbranch were dearly missed, but the Clan was slowly moving on. Frostbreeze vowed that she would tell her kits stories about them, and she would warn them about Hawkgrowl if they ever misbehaved.

Heronfall padded toward the RiverClan border, yawning. He didn't go to the last Gathering, which happened last night, but it didn't bother him too much. However, it surprised him to hear that Splashpelt, RiverClan's deputy, had died.

The black-and-white tom reached the border with RiverClan and sniffed around. Whitelion sent him to patrol the border and the whole area by the gorge, up until their territory stopped right in front of the barn.

When he made sure that no cat trespassed, he marked the border and was ready to move on when he heard paw steps. He suddenly panicked and spun around, but sighed in relief when he saw Leopardstorm walk toward him and stop on the Twoleg bridge.

"Hi there, Heronfall!"

"Hello, Leopardstorm. What are you doing here?" Heronfall asked, tilting his head.

"Well, I..I was at the Gathering yesterday, and Rosestar told the Clans about a rogue attack and how two of your cats were killed. Are you all right?" Leopardstorm asked, looking worried.

Heronfall blinked in surprise, but nodded. "Yes, I'm fine. Why did you ask?"

"Well, you're still my friend, even if we're from different clans." Leopardstorm meowed, looking anxious. "And you didn't come at the Gathering, so I was a little worried."

Heronfall purred and sat down, resting his tail over his paws. "I understand. Well, I'm fine, but you should leave soon. It's freezing today!"

"True." Leopardstorm meowed and looked toward the sun that was just peeking over the horizon. "At least leaf-bare is almost over."

"I can't wait." Heronfall sighed in relief. The snow was already starting to melt, even though the days were still cold. But they were less colder than they used to be, and Heronfall couldn't wait for newleaf. He then got up. "Anyway, I should go. Whitelion wants me to patrol the territory. See you at the next Gathering!"

"See you!" Leopardstorm nodded and turned around, rushing toward his camp. Heronfall padded away, following the river's direction and checking for any suspicious activity.

Even though Hawkgrowl was exiled, he still lived with the fear that he or the rogue group would return, but they haven't returned yet, and Hawkgrowl didn't leave with them, either. There was a small chance that they would ever come back to the barn.

Heronfall looked down at the gorge, then back up. He froze when he saw a rock that was close to the edge of the cliff. A painful memory flashed strongly in his mind about Meadow, his sister, who fell in the gorge. He sighed and moved forward, pushing the thought away. *I still miss her, but I know she's watching over me. And one day, I'll see her again. I hope she's proud of me.*

Suddenly, Heronfall stopped. He sniffed the air and looked around, then looked in surprise in front of him. Near the edge of the cliff sat a rogue who looked at the gorge. But it wasn't any ordinary rogue. It was Rattlesnake, Heronfall's father, when he was still in his first life.

He growled, lashing his tail and padding toward him. *What is he doing here?! He's not the reason I died, but he still didn't do anything to stop Nectar throughout my whole life!*

However, he tried to look calm as he approached Rattlesnake. He bared his teeth. "What are you doing here?"

The rogue looked up at him, his eyes wide. "Oh, I'm sorry, Clan cat. I was just admiring the gorge."

Heronfall hissed. "You're on WindClan territory. Leave now."

Rattlesnake didn't move. Instead, he sighed and looked back at the gorge. "You look a lot like my son."

What? Heronfall tilted his head, taken aback.

"I used to have two kits." Rattlesnake murmured, more for himself, as if he already forgot that Heronfall was there. "They were called Meadow and Hiron. They ran off to play one day, so me and Nectar, my mate, went to search for them. When we found them, however.." He took a deep breath.

He's going to say I pushed Meadow off, won't he? Heronfall snorted and sat down.

"Meadow fell in the gorge." Rattlesnake whispered. "I don't know why, but Nectar blamed it on Hiron, saying that he pushed her off. I didn't know what to do, but I was grief-stricken and, without thinking, I agreed with Nectar. I was just so upset.. and then we stopped caring for him. Nectar wanted to kill him, but I refused. He was my son, after all, so I told her it would be better if we kicked him out of the den."

Heronfall looked at him in shock, but Rattlesnake continued. "She did, and although I regretted not intervening, I knew there was no way to change Nectar's mind. When I finally recovered from my grief over Meadow, Nectar.. she told me she was planning to kill Hiron. So she did. I wanted to stop her, but it was all in vain. And when she came back with bloody paws and told me she killed him.. I realized I made a grave mistake."

Rattlesnake then raised his head and looked ahead at RiverClan's territory from past the gorge. "I loved Nectar, she was a great mother in the beginning, but she was just driven by grief.. I still don't understand how she could kill her own son, but.." He suddenly stopped and looked at Heronfall, as if he remembered that a WindClan cat was there. His eyes grew wide with realization. "Oh,

I'm so sorry! I didn't.. I forgot. Sorry for rambling."

"It's okay." Heronfall sighed. *Nectar was the one who killed me, and she was the one who told me to leave, but Rattlesnake didn't try to stop her.. and now I understand why.*

For the first time in moons, Heronfall felt something else for Rattlesnake other than anger: understanding. He sympathized with his father. *It's still not right. He should have tried to do something. But at least I know that he's not a cruel monster like Nectar.*

"I'm sorry for filling your head with my life story, Clan cat." Rattlesnake apologized, getting up. "I'm sure you don't care about it, but it felt good to get that off my mind."

I do care about it. More than you think. Heronfall thought, but he said nothing. And although he understood his father better than before, he would never be able to forgive him. "It's all right. But you should leave now, before my Clanmates find you. I don't think they would be as understanding as I was."

Rattlesnake nodded. "All right, I'll go back to Nectar. And, I'm not sure if you care, but we're moving from our den. We lived on the other side of the Thunderpath, beyond the barn, but I think it's better if we leave, and Nectar agreed, and.. oh, I'm sorry, I keep forgetting that you probably don't understand why I'm saying all of this." He chuckled.

Heronfall purred. *But I do understand. And actually, I feel relieved that they're leaving. Nectar was my mother, but not she isn't anymore. She is the reason Cougarheart suffered so much. But not Rattlesnake. He's.. His emotions are complicated, but I sort of understand him. He loved Nectar, and he grieved Meadow's death like any father would. I still think he should have taken my side, though. He was also my father, but it really doesn't matter anymore. All of this happened a long time ago. I don't care about Nectar anymore.*

"Sorry, again." Rattlesnake meowed, then turned and padded away toward the Thunderpath. But before he left, he looked back at him one more time. "I can tell you're a good cat. Good luck in life, Clan cat."

Heronfall looked after him, surprised, but he nodded gratefully. *Even though I sometimes miss my old life, it's way better here in WindClan. Whitelion and Nightshine are great parents, and Cougarheart is the best friend I could ever had. And my Clanmates are great, even though some of them are a bit too confident for their own good.*

"Who was that?" Cougarheart's question snapped Heronfall to reality.

He blinked and looked at her. "Oh! He was Rattlesnake, my father."

"Your father?" Cougarheart blinked, looking after him. "So Nectar's mate, then. The she-cat who killed you."

"Exactly, but it doesn't matter. They're leaving." Heronfall meowed and sat down.

"What?" Cougarheart looked at him, tilting her head. "Why?"

"Oh, right, you didn't hear what he said." Heronfall meowed. "When I approached Rattlesnake, he explained to me his entire life story, because he doesn't know that I'm actually his son, and.."

Heronfall started explaining everything that Rattlesnake told him. When he finished, Cougarheart rolled her eyes, looking unconvinced. "Fine, he tried to stop Nectar, but he didn't actually manage to. He's still a fox-heart, if you ask me."

Heronfall purred. "I guess. Anyway, I think I'm done patrolling. I should go back to camp."

"I'm coming, too." Cougarheart yawned. "I have no idea why, but I'm tired. I couldn't sleep well last night."

"Let's go, then." Heronfall meowed and got up, rushing back to camp. Cougarheart followed him.

When they entered camp, Whitelion approached them. "Greetings. Anything to report, Heronfall?"

The black-and-white tom shook his head. "No, nothing unusual. Everything was fine."

"That's good to hear." Whitelion dipped his head, looking relaxed. "You can rest now."

"Thank you." Heronfall meowed and padded in the warriors' den. He yawned and lay down in his nest, resting his head on his paws and quickly falling asleep.

Chapter 21

Heronfall padded out of the warriors' den and looked around. The sun was at its highest spot in the sky now, and everyone was sitting in camp, either eating, talking, or listening to Whitelion's orders.

He padded toward the fresh-kill pile and sat down, nodding toward Foggydream and Lightningstep. "Hello there!"

"Oh, hello Heronfall!" Lightningstep meowed. "What was patrolling at dawn like?"

"Cold." Heronfall shivered and took a rabbit from the fresh-kill pile and started eating it. "I can't wait for newleaf!"

"Me neither." Foggydream yawned. "Also, you missed a lot of things while you were sleeping. Frostbreeze's kits arrived!"

"What?" Heronfall blinked, surprised. "Really?"

"Yes! She had two kits. She named them Snowkit and Dunekit. They're so adorable!" Foggydream purred. "Sandypelt is very proud of them."

"I'm sure one day they will be good warriors." Heronfall meowed, then finished his rabbit and got up. "Anyway, I think I'll go stretch my legs for a bit, then I'll come back to visit the kits. See you later!"

"All right, see you!" Lightningstep meowed.

"Don't get lost!" Foggydream joked.

Heronfall purred in amusement and turned around, padding out of camp. He hissed as he realized that the snow was melting even more, leaving behind puddles of water that were slowly turning into mud. It made the moor look messy and dirty, and he hated how the mud clung to his fur.

He sniffed the air and looked around, wanting to hunt.

"Heronfall!"

Heronfall's fur bristled and he spun around, but relaxed when he saw Cougarheart approaching him.

She purred. "Why are you so surprised? Actually, I think you're still scared of everything that makes a sound, like you were when you were a kit."

"Yeah, yeah." Heronfall purred, amused, then stretched. "I was about to try to hunt a bird, since that was my dream when I was a kit. Do you want to join me?"

"Sure." Cougarheart meowed and got up, sniffing the air. Heronfall did the same, although he could hardly scent anything.

"You know, it must be weird, having lived two lives." Cougarheart suddenly meowed, looking at Heronfall. "I didn't really ask about this, since we forgave each other a moon ago, but I've been thinking about it. Isn't it weird?"

"A bit, yes." Heronfall nodded, leaving the camp behind them as they padded away alongside each other. "But I'm glad I was given a second chance."

"Me too." Cougarheart sighed, looking at her paws. "I've already told you, but I was so sad when you died.. well, when you lost your first life. You were my first friend, and finding you dead just.. hurt me. I thought I lost you forever."

"I know." Heronfall sighed and looked at her. "But I'm fine now, don't worry. I'm not going anywhere."

"Yes, I know, but I didn't know that when I was a kit." Cougarheart confessed. "I was always wondering if you were watching over me from StarClan, when you were actually sitting in camp. It's just that.. if you would have never returned from StarClan, I would probably still be grieving you. It hurts to lose a friend."

"It surely does." Heronfall meowed, his heart piercing as he remembered how sad he had been after Meadow's death. "I still get sad sad when I think about Meadow, and I still miss her, but.. I

have friends here that give me company. You, Foggydream, Lightningstep, Mushroomspot, Nightshine, and Whitelion. Although sometimes I want to tell some of them that I'm Heronkit, I know I can't. But I wish I could."

"You know, you were very brave when you told me the truth." Cougarheart purred, flicking her tail. "I'm glad you did, but when I found out the truth, I was really angry. I'm sorry, I was just.. not thinking at all, and it came as a huge shock to me.. but you knew that you weren't supposed to tell anyone, and that you would suffer the consequences if you did. You almost lost your second life, but Featherwish, or whatever her name was, let you come back. But if you hadn't.."

Cougarheart sighed. "If you hadn't, I would not have forgiven myself."

Heronfall sighed, looking at her reassuringly. "But I came back, see? You don't have to think about what would have happened, because nothing bad happened. It doesn't matter anymore. I'm still here."

"You're right." Cougarheart took a deep breath. "I'm glad you're my friend, Heronfall, and I'm very glad I found you when I did, and that you told me the truth. You're a really brave cat."

"Thank you." Heronfall purred, surprised. "But you're a great friend too, you know? Brave, as well. WindClan is proud to have you as one of its warriors."

"I suppose so." Cougarheart meowed, but then froze. She got up and sniffed the air, then lowered her voice. "You've been wanting to catch a bird since your kithood, right?"

"Yes, why?" Heronfall tilted his head.

"Well.." Cougarheart pointed with her tail toward a sparrow. The bird landed on a rock with its back at the cats, unaware of the danger behind it.

Heronfall's eyes grew wide with surprise and instantly dropped into

a crouch. He stalked toward the bird, locking his eyes on the prey. When he got close enough, he quickly unsheathed his claws and pounced on the sparrow. He killed it with a swift bite at its neck, then grabbed it and turned around, holding his prey proudly. "I caught a bird!"

"It was about time." Cougarheart purred, padding toward him. "Wanting to do something since kithood and not doing it until warriorhood is a long time to wait. Good job!"

"Thanks." Heronfall dipped his head and quickly buried it. "What do you want to-"

But Cougarheart silenced him with a flick of her tail. She crouched and looked at a rabbit, and Heronfall fell silent. Then, Cougarheart quickly sprinted toward the rabbit. The prey looked around and let out a squeak, trying to run away, but Cougarheart jumped on it, digging her claws in the rabbit's back. She then killed it and picked it up, turning around.

"Nice catch!" Heronfall meowed.

Cougarheart padded toward him, purring. "Thanks!"

"I think we should go back to camp now." Heronfall meowed, looking at the sky. The sun was about to set, and although he wasn't tired, he knew that it would be better to go back in camp. Although newleaf was right around the corner, nights were still extremely cold, especially out in the moor.

"I agree." Cougarheart nodded, shivering.

Heronfall turned around and gently digged through the snow where he buried his sparrow, picking it up. When he turned around, Cougarheart was looking at him mischievously.

"Let's race, you slow snail!" Cougarheart joked, then turned around and rushed toward the camp. Heronfall ran after her, finally at peace.

It wasn't easy keeping my first life a secret from the others, but I'm glad I told Cougarheart. Even if she was upset with me at first. I'm glad she

forgave me. I'm sure the other cats didn't grieve my death as much as Cougarheart did, so she had every right to know the truth. And now that she forgave me, with Hawkgrowl and the rogue group gone, WindClan is finally at peace. I promise to protect Cougarheart and WindClan forever. I owe them my life, because I would not be who I am now without them.

Final Allegiances

WindClan

Leader**: Rosestar** - Cream she-cat with green eyes

Deputy: **Whitelion** - Tall white tom with dark amber eyes

Medicine cat: **Cloudwatcher** - Deaf white she-cat with blue eyes

Warriors: **Beesun** - Yellow-and-white she-cat with black stripes

Badgerleap - Black tom with white stripes on his face

Otterbounce - Dark brown tom with green eyes

Sandypelt - Cream tabby tom

Skyflower - Black-and-silver she-cat with blue eyes

Nightshine - Black-and-white she-cat with blue eyes

Cinderstream - Pale gray tabby she-cat with a white belly

Mushroomspot - Cream tom with brown and black spots and a white belly

Vinebreeze - Gray tom with cream spots and a white belly

Dovestorm - Gray-and-cream she-cat with green eyes

Cougarheart - Black she-cat with a light brown head, spots and belly, a black ear and a cream ear with green eyes

Heronfall - Black-and-white tom with white spots, blue eyes, and

folded ears

Lightningstep - Black tom with a white marking on his face

Foggydream - Gray-and-white tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Needlestrike - Silver tabby she-cat with black ears and paws

Queens: **Frostbreeze** - Fluffy gray-and-white she-cat with blue eyes. Mother to Sandypelt's kits: Snowkit, a white she-kit with gray paws, and Dunekit, a dark cream tom with lighter cream markings and blue eyes

Elders: **Volehiss** - Brown tom with a cream belly and white stripes

Poppyflight - Brown-and-white she-cat with a ginger face

Clover - Very pale blue-gray former rogue she-cat with yellow eyes

ThunderClan

Leader: **Beetlestar** - Brown-and-white tabby tom

Deputy: **Gingerflame** - Dark ginger tom with amber eyes

Medicine cat: **Rainsong** - Gray-and-silver spotted she-cat

Apprentice, Pinestorm - Dark brown tabby tom with a cream belly

Warriors: **Acornfall** - Ginger-and-brown she-cat with a white belly and paws

Tigerfrost - Dark brown tabby tom with white paws and a cream belly

Thornstrike - Golden-brown tom with black stripes

Lilydream - White she-cat with silver stripes

Flowershade - Black-and-white speckled she-cat with blue eyes

Berrybrush - Brown-and-cream she-cat with green eyes

Twigheart - Pale brown she-cat with green eyes

Smokegrowl - Pale gray tom with blue eyes

Goldenwing - Golden tabby she-cat

Maplewish - Pale cream she-cat with brown stripes

Queens: **Cherryleaf** - Fluffy ginger-and-white she-cat with green eyes. Mother to Thornstrike's kits: Blazekit, a golden tom with ginger patches, Deerkit, a brown tabby tom with white legs, and Dawnkit, a pale golden she-kit

ShadowClan

Leader: **Crowstar** - Black tom with a gray belly and paws

Deputy: **Spiderthorn** - Black and reddish-brown tom with amber eyes

Medicine cat: **Foxfeather** - Ginger-and-white tom with black legs

Warriors: **Hazelberry** - Gray, brown and white she-cat with green eyes

Tinyshadow - Small black tom

Mousefang - Gray tom with a black tail and blue eyes

Eaglefall - Ginger-and-brown tom with a white muzzle and belly

Owlcry - Brown she-cat with green eyes

Oaktail - Pale brown tom with amber eyes

Antscreech - Black tom with dark ginger dapples

Stemfang - Ginger-and-white tabby tom

Ivycloud - White she-cat with brown dapples and blue eyes

Sunnyheart - Tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat

Rootnose - Gray tom with black stripes

Flickerspot - Black-and-ginger tom with white paws and gray spots on his face

Turtlepurr - Tortoiseshell she-cat

Elders: **Spikehiss** - Dark brown tom with spiky fur, black stripes and a white face

RiverClan

Leader: **Shimmerstar** - Silver she-cat with white spots and blue eyes

Deputy: **Birchsong** - Dark brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

Medicine cat: **Jaymoon** - Black-and-gray tabby tom

Apprentice, Mosswish - Ginger-and-cream she-cat with a white belly and amber eyes

Warriors: **Stonefall** - Gray tom

Eelstrike - Black she-cat with white stripes and amber eyes

Brackenfall - Dark ginger tom with white paws and a black-striped tail

Blackstream - Black tom with gray stripes and blue eyes

Amberdawn - Cream-and-white tabby she-cat with amber eyes

Leopardstorm - Golden tom with black spots and amber eyes

Streamsong - White she-cat with silver paws

Honeypool - Golden-and-cream tabby she-cat

Flamewhisper - Ginger tom with blue eyes

Dusktrail - Brown-and-cream tom

Queens: **Echolight** - Fluffy dark gray she-cat with a white belly and paws. Expecting Stonefall's kits

Elders: **Bearcloud** - Black tom with a stump for a tail, yellow eyes and a white muzzle

Cats Outside Clans

Rattlesnake - Brown tom with black stripes and a long, white tail

Nectar - Black-and-cream she-cat